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THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

COLLABORATIVE AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL INSIGHTS INTO ADMINISTRATIVE PRACTICE

BY

ELIZABETH FLAHERTY ©

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE

OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled *Collaborative Autobiographical Insights Into Administrative Practice* submitted by Elizabeth Flaherty in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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R.L. Butt, External Examiner

Date September 21, 1994

This thesis is dedicated

to my husband, Tim

for his love and support

and to Mary Beth

the light of my life

and to the memory of my grandmother,

Mary Ann Gallivan Phalen

ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the personal and professional lives of four administrators using the collaborative autobiographical process developed by Butt and Raymond (1989, 1990). The four stories were transcribed in the administrator's own words and after each story collaborative themes were identified by the group of administrators.

The thesis describes in detail the collaborative autobiographical process and how it can be a tool for administrators in school improvement. In Chapter 1 there is a review on the literature on autobiography and leadership, and in Chapter 2 the research method is described in detail including the four aspects of the process: working reality, pedagogy, personal and professional past and the future. This chapter also describes my own experiences as a researcher, the details and specifics of the study and the evaluative process used.

The four administrative stories are presented in the following four chapters, with collaborative discussion and themes identified by the group at the conclusion of each story and an added section of my personal reflections.

In Chapter 7 are the principals' evaluation of the process which was done immediately upon completion and again six months later.

In the final chapter, I reflected on the literature. The final section of the thesis makes recommendations how this

process might be used both at the school level and in other settings.

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CHAPTER ONE

THE CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

Over the past eleven years, I have developed an interest in teacher development and growth because I believe this has a direct effect on student development and growth, and I have come to believe in the importance of school based improvement initiatives. Principals have to abandon the tendency of looking outside the school for quick solutions to problems and instead understand the importance of, and learn how to work with their staffs to tap the richness and expertise of knowledge in their own buildings for the answers to problems. Barth (1990) believed that although much has been written about school reform in the past decade such as national reports and studies, there has been insufficient attention given to the important relationships among the adults within the school and consideration should be given to how the abundant untapped energy, inventiveness and idealism within the school might be encouraged.

Another belief that I hold is that principals should spend time building a sense of community with staff, giving members of the school community time to collaborate, reflect and work on some common goals and to set a course on how to accomplish them. In order for staff members to reach a point of working together they must feel safe and secure to make mistakes and learn from their mistakes without fear of

reprimand. They must feel free and open to take risks with other colleagues. Only when principals come to some level of success with these two objectives do they begin to initiate any school improvement projects.

These generalizations on school based improvement come from my own experience as an administrator involved in innovative programs including whole language, writing process, math manipulative programs, and school wide reading programs. Although all these initiatives were worthwhile projects in themselves it appeared that these change initiatives only touched the surface of long term school improvement with teachers. I realized that as principal, I initiated many new programs without allowing staff the time and opportunity to reflect, collaborate and work together to come to some decision and direction on our school improvement project.

As a principal dealing on a regular basis with the pressures for change in education, I have constantly been in search of ways to approach and deal with these issues more effectively. Collaborative autobiography offered a way to achieve this goal. The process of collaborative autobiography offered me a window to work on teacher development and school improvement. In the research, course work and writing of Butt and Raymond (1988, 1990) the process of collaborative autobiography is concerned with understanding teacher development and school improvement from the perspective of teachers' lives and careers. Butt and Raymond (1990, p.1)

noted that it has only been over the past fifteen years that researchers have begun to pay attention to teacher's knowledge and "life course" methodologies and the process of collaborative autobiography has become a window for inquiry into the nature of teaching.

The process of collaborative autobiography as described by Butt (1988) asked the participants to respond to the following questions: "What is the nature of their working reality? What and how do you teach in that context? How did you come to be that way? After writing autobiographical pieces on these three areas, the participants are to examine how they wish to be in the future" (p.4). This collaborative autobiographical process, as Butt (1988, p.5) noted, regards all participants as learners and teachers in a climate of trust, support, frankness and honesty without direct criticism. Questioning and dialogue are encouraged in the process to better understand each other's perspective. At the conclusion of the process the goal is for the participants to have some fairly explicit ideas of who they are as unique persons and professionals and some sense of where they are going in the future.

Through reading, courses and discussion, I came to understand that collaborative autobiography would be an effective method in looking at school based improvement. My background in collaborative autobiography included a summer course in 1990 and co-teaching the course during the winter of

1991. Over that three month winter course, I observed that the group of students began to affirm and support each other and develop into a community of learners. That notion of community and working to improve our professional practice was what I had hoped to bring back to my school as a principal.

Having noted this growth in a group of teachers as a result of these courses and observing how they reflected on both positive and negative aspects of their practice with other colleagues, I could see how this process could be a valuable tool to improve the learning environment in a school. From my work in collaborative autobiography I had also experienced a sense of professional growth in myself.

Purpose of This Study

Teachers had been the focus of the work by Butt and Raymond (1988, 1990), but I believed that administrators also could gain greater insights into their professional practices by working through this process, therefore I sought participants among my colleague administrators. The overall goal was to work through the collaborative autobiographical process with each other, to then use it with our staffs, and in turn give staffs opportunities to collaborate and work more closely as a team on school improvement projects.

The purpose of this study is two-fold; to document how the process of collaborative autobiography can assist principals, first, to come to a better understanding of their

own administrative development and second, from the knowledge and insight gained from collaborative autobiography, identify possible genuine collaborative school improvement initiatives for their school community.

Specific questions which guided the study were:

1. What were the sources of personal and professional knowledge for each administrator?
2. Were there important individuals in each administrator's life who had a significant impact on their ways of thinking and acting?
3. Which particular life episodes either in the administrator's personal or professional life had an impact on them?
4. How does this process of collaborative autobiography help administrators gain better insights into their personal and professional lives?
5. How was the collaborative nature of this process helpful to administrators?
6. Did the process help administrators reflect on their practices and look at ways to change?
7. Did this process help administrators look at school improvement from another perspective and ways to engage the staff in a more collaborative way in school initiatives?
8. In doing such a collaborative study with a group of

administrators how difficult was it to develop a culture of openness and trust?

Significance of This Study

Just as Butt (1988) suggested that teachers are faced with a myriad of other people's ideas, materials and standardized tests which do not take account of classroom reality, pupil needs and the teacher's style, so too administrators are faced with pulls from their school, community, school boards and government, and with pressures to be more innovative. From administrators exploring and understanding their own professional development and how to improve schools through a collaborative means such as collaborative autobiography, they may come to the realization that instead of doing school improvement to teachers, they can allow their staffs the freedom to take responsibility and ownership of the school improvement project.

The many societal demands being placed on schools for mainstreaming, multicultural education, expanded curriculum and quality education, all to be achieved within increasing financial constraints place great stress on the school so that some administrators look for easy answers outside the school to solve this myriad of problems. They should look however, within themselves and work in collaboration with their staff to find the answers for their schools. The practice of school administration has to be an interactive process involving

students, staff, parents and administrators.

In order to be able to address the many societal demands for making improvements in education, and to foster learning and growth for students and teachers, schools require a vision and a sense of community. To build a sense of school community, leaders in collaboration with staff, parents and students need to develop a vision and explore ways that vision can be translated into the daily life of the school. Barth (1990, p.157) concluded that visions have gone underground because when they emerge above ground they are trampled. We all need to recognize that there are abundant vision killers at large out there and within our schools. There are many cynics in schools whose dreams have been dashed and who now take peculiar delight in dashing the dreams of others.

Barth (1990, p.157) stated that another vision killer is the tendency to jump to premature implementation. It takes awhile for visions to be savoured, to permeate, to be enjoyed and celebrated before they are subjected to the hard knocks that come with improving schools. In making visions Barth (1985) believed that we cannot be too hopeful, entertaining high expectations or exacting expectations are doomed for failure and disappointment. In defining a school Barth (1990, p.158) stated that a school is "four walls surrounding a future." This image helps in understanding what school improvement is. Barth (1990, p.158) noted that the character and quality of schools will dramatically improve when, and if,

those who work in schools, - teachers, students, parents and administrators come in touch with one another, with their personal visions, and with the way they would like their schools to be, and take deliberate steps to move toward them. This is the process of school improvement emerging from within the four walls of the school. Barth (1990) wrote of how one school person, Ronald Luehmann, conveyed this message:

A Thousand Miles

> I travelled a thousand miles to find a vision. I came to the citadel of learning, for surely Harvard would have the vision I needed. I asked and probed and thought and reflected. I questioned and looked from person to person.
>
> I found visions. Many of them. They came in all sorts of shapes and sizes. They were large ones and modest ones. There were complex ones and simple ones. They all seem to fit - yet none of them fit me. Why?
>
> Then I remembered that I once had a vision - a vision that was my very own. Where had it gone? What had I done with it? So I started searching those long dark corridors of past years.
>
> I found my vision. Rusty, dirty from lack of care - but still there. It was my vision, a vision not exactly like anyone else's. With the power to carry me forward, to shine light on the path of the future - for me and for those with whom I might share my vision.
>
> And I learned an important lesson. I learned that each of us must have a vision. It must be uniquely ours. For until we have a vision to share, we can't understand anyone else's. I learned I must keep my vision polished brightly through daily attention, or I will lose it again. That it can act as a guiding beacon only as long as I hold it in front of me.
>
> And I discovered that I can look to myself. That I am rich in resources and thoughts and ideas. That the future, my future, lies not out there but

inside me. (Pgs. 158, 159)

During the past thirty or more years most attempts at educational reform which involve significant changes at the classroom level have had limited impact on educational practice (Fullan, 1985). Butt, Townsend and Raymond (1990, p.1) wrote that after fifteen years of attempted educational reform the Rand Studies (1978) revealed that in the United States only 5% of the efforts at change have been fruitful. At the core of this problem on educational reform is the nature of the relationship between practitioners (teachers) and theorists (reformers).

They (1990, p.1,2) suggested that in dealing with this problem, it is essential to move away from a logistical perspective that theory and practice are separate to more dialectic and problematic approaches. The latter two approaches, which involve the participants in a cooperative and collaborative endeavour (where teachers re-interpret prescriptions and mandates from theorists (outsiders) to meet their own and students' needs, interests and concerns) have had the highest degree of curriculum implementation (Butt & Wideen, 1974). Butt (1981) believed, however, that over the next ten years while research became more familiar with teacher's culture and change, more successful change occurred only where teachers could not only re-interpret curriculum to suit classroom and school obligations but where teachers had opportunities to adopt or redesign curriculum materials to

meet highly personal and professional interests.

This does not have to be a complicated, costly, or time consuming process: Huberman and Crandall (1983) emphasized:

> Innovations entailing significant practice change, live and die by the amount of assistance they receive. Providing aid does not mean mobilizing large armies of external consultants: most can be done locally and a little regular contact goes a long way. Simply arranging for teachers next door to one another to meet periodically pays handsome rewards. (p.76)

Goodlad (1994) stated that school reform has been driven by a theory based on a simple input/output model. If we wish to reform schools, we vary the inputs and check the outputs. Goodlad (1994) noted that the use of this theory in testing the power of any particular variable in educational research has produced a litany of "no significant effects". Even the well documented analysis of failure in an era of school reform does little to dampen enthusiasm for this theory.

Goodlad (1994, p.636) wrote that it seems that this theory is based on simplicity. In pupil learning, for example, there is a cause, such as teacher behaviour, and an effect, usually measured in terms of student test scores. Teach the teacher a new method of teaching reading, and the pupils will improve their reading scores. Unfortunately, repeated recourse to the model has accounted for only incremental improvements in test scores. Teach school

principals the methods first, then they will teach teachers, and the scores will go up more. Since in situations which require a quantum leap in student performance teachers would need to vary a dozen or more variables, each contributing 3% or so to improvement, the role of principal as "instructional leader" becomes impossible.

Sarason (1971) has described the ways in which individual school cultures cope with well-intentioned intrusions from outside reformers and how inattention to school culture predicts failure. Coleman (1966) found that the weight that must be attributed to family educational background in accounting for students' academic achievement strengthens the importance of the ecological perspective in seeking to understand educational institutions in order to be able to improve them.

In an effort to find widely applicable interventions, politically driven initiatives to reform education ignore the uniqueness of individual school cultures. Each school is viewed as a closed box, with the ecology of the contents excluded for consideration: a school is a school is a school.

Goodlad (1994, p.636) concluded in this model of inputs and outputs that improving the schools involves manipulating the inputs and sharpening and stabilizing the outcomes. Proposals for merit pay, awards to achieving schools, the introduction of new technologies, mandated curricula and the like have been replaced by proposals to restructure the

context outside the school: efforts to move to a system of charter schools or schools of choice. What happens inside the box is largely ignored.

In order for the outsiders (theorists) and insiders (teachers) to participate successfully in collaborative endeavours both groups need to understand the teacher or the principal as a person and a professional who possesses knowledge and who is developing.

Blumberg and Greenfield (1980) wrote that it takes a unique person to give a school an image of what it can be and then to provide the drive, support and skills necessary to make that image approximate reality. But just as teachers have to engage in learning so have principals to become learners as well as leaders. Barth (1985) noted that principals need to be seriously involved in designing and conducting their own professional development. With teachers, it is critical that they have ownership of their own learning. Learning for principals has to be something that they do, not something others do to or for them. Barth (1990) found that principals, like teachers carry with them extraordinary insights about their work that are seldom explicit for them, let alone accessible to others. He (1981) believed that in the Principal Centre he developed at Harvard, he battled the belief that one's success in schools is a private matter, best kept from potential competitors or critics. Many worried that when principals talked they would reveal not craft knowledge

but war stories.

It was suggested by Barth (1990) that the process of principals being helpful to others as givers as well as receivers is one of the powerful ways of generating respect and recognition for oneself as well as for those one helps. The most sophisticated staff development does not come from listening to good words of others but from principals sharing with others what they know. Every principal is good at something. By reflecting on what the principal does, by organizing it, by sharing and articulating that knowledge principals learn.

Barth (1990) outlined a conceptual model for professional development of principals as engaging in practice, reflecting on practice, articulating practice, better understanding practice and then making efforts to improve practice. An alternative to the principal centre process outlined by Barth would be the process of collaborative autobiography.

Butt, Townsend & Raymond (1990) concluded that collaborative autobiography offered a way of providing the necessary context and conditions for cooperative professional development. Biographical (Aspinall, 1986) and life history approaches can be used for successful professional development. By using collaborative autobiography within a school as a staff development project and working through the four key questions (What is the nature of my working reality?, How do I think and act in that context and why?, How, through

my work life and personal history, did I come to be that way?, and How do I wish to become in my professional future?) there can develop a climate of trust encouraging initiative taking and team building. Butt, Townsend & Raymond (1990) suggested that for school groups which have experienced collaborative autobiography before embarking on the planning and implementation of a school based project, there has been documented success in the achievement of project goals.

For Butt, et al. (1990) most issues related to educational reform, whether curriculum implementation, change, or school improvement projects, come down to the basic one of providing for individual and collective human development and healthy human interrelationships.

The principal's role in the change process within a school is to facilitate group participation. Principals who engage in collaborative autobiography as a professional development activity, should be better able to help their staffs with professional development. However, where principals have a limited understanding of their own administrative philosophy actions may be taken where a staff does not have a sense of ownership of any change initiative. Unfortunately, what often happens is that many of the changes which are being implemented by administrators are yielding either little improvement or are having a negative effect on school culture. This continued failure calls for new approaches to engage in successful attempts at reform. Purkey

and Smith (1982) concluded that:

> in attempting to build more effective schools we must abandon our reliance on facile solutions and the assumption that fundamental change can be brought about from the top down. Instead, a more promising notion rests on the conception of schools functioning as social systems with distinctive cultures in which the improvement effort is directed toward incremental long-term cultural change. (p.68)

The practice of teaching tends to be an alienating experience. In schools where professional communities are not valued, teachers become islands in themselves and very protective and possessive of their individual classrooms. Just as many teachers may experience alienation so also may administrators face similar loneliness. Wolcott (1973) concluded that administrators are very careful not to show their vulnerability to staff, parents and other colleagues since vulnerability may be viewed as a weakness and used against them. Instead of reflecting inwardly and being accepting of themselves, these administrators tend to create a facade of competence that may not be the true self. The facade then creates problems when dealing with staff, students and parents as such administrators have difficulty dealing with others' problems until they have developed a better understanding of themselves.

Pinar (1986) referred to the "architecture - of - self" as the concept of self being constructed over time as a result of numerous interactions in numerous contexts. There exists no disjuncture between private and public here. The one feeds the other. The personal dispositions and experiences accumulated over the years help shape the professional role of educator as it is subjectively experienced. The self goes on developing, for it is a process, not an entity. It is also a social process formed in interaction with others and in interaction with oneself. Interaction with others helps to construct and give shape to the chosen self, which finds new powers of expression as it grows. It acquires sharper definition by contrast with negative others; and new forms of articulation by internal debate, self-reflection, and interaction between the "I" and the "Me" (Mead, 1934).

One process which would allow administrators the opportunity of looking within themselves, both in their private and professional lives is collaborative autobiography. Interacting with other administrators through the process of narrative story is one means to developing some creative ways to face and solve their problems in both their professional and private lives. The process of interaction therefore could help administrators in their construction of what it means to be an administrator.

Collaborative autobiography can also offer administrators a form of affirmation about what they are doing. By engaging

in autobiographical research administrators will be able to illuminate the connections between character, setting, intellect, personal philosophy, administrative ideology, the meaning of actions, and understanding the origins and consequences of their administrative actions over time. Goodson (1980) stated:

> in order to understand how a person thinks, acts, feels, and intends, and how a person knows what they know, it is necessary to understand the relationship and tensions among context and the individual lives not only as related to the present but the past, as well (p.2).

This study is aimed at documenting one way principals can improve themselves both professionally and personally and use the skills they learned in promoting staff development and school improvement initiatives.

Review of Related Literature

The literature in two areas informed this study: first that on leadership and the development of collaborative culture was explored in order to identify what needed to happen in schools if a culture were to emerge and be sustained; second, a review of the literature on autobiography and life stories as theories of research for use in education was reviewed to highlight the conceptual background to collaborative autobiography.

Leadership Literature

Meaningful Change and School Improvement

Fullan (1985) suggested that to find meaning in change, individuals should alter their ways of thinking and doing. He suggested some important factors essential for understanding meaningful change. They include the following: a) change takes place over time, b) the initial stages of any significant change always involve anxiety and uncertainty, c) technical and psychological support are crucial to cope with anxiety, d) change involves learning new skills through practice and feedback.

Fullan (1991) stated that conflict and disagreement are not only inevitable but fundamental to successful change. Smooth implementation is often a sign that not much is really changing. Persistence is a critical attribute of successful change.

Administrators must be sensitive and appreciate that even small changes can transgress sacred elements of the school culture. Fullan and Hargreaves (1991) believed that administrators have to understand the school and its culture before changing it. They recommend that principals take time and be patient since tradition is as important as change (Louden, 1991).

Fullan and Hargreaves (1991) concluded that effective improvement means more than change, it involves conserving what is good. Nias and her colleagues (1989) argued that

awareness involves lots of observation, high amounts of listening and talking to determine what teachers are doing, what they value, what are their satisfactions, dissatisfactions and their sources of pride and concern.

Conley (1993) wrote for meaningful change to take place there has to be a readiness for change as the staff should want and choose to change, and a school vision should be developed by the school community with principals and teachers having ownership of it. As an administrator one has to listen to the language of the school, the language is a "party line", whether it be abstract or specific. In engaging in meaningful change the principal and staff have to come to an understanding of the complexity of the change process and the support needed to implement change.

Cox (1983) contended that school improvement efforts need support at two levels: "assistance focused on the content of the new practice, directed at the teachers who are implementing the innovations; and assistance focused on the context of the new practice, aimed at securing the necessary approval, resources, facilities, and personnel to ensure continuation and institutionalization of the innovation" (p.13). Cox (1983) stated:

> it is up to the constellation of assisters -- central office staff, principals, and external helpers -- to see that change efforts in schools receive support. (p.13)

Finally Conley (1993) wrote that some notable examples of success are necessary in order to keep the group involved in the change, moving with both short and long term objectives. Therefore change for the sake of change, without involving the participants in the process is destined for failure.

Sathe (1985) concluded that cultural change involves a change in the context and/or the existing organizational culture. This may involve the reordering and modifying of the existing beliefs and values. Schein (1985) explained change as an incremental process where the method for change was to "persuade people to unlearn or question their current pattern of beliefs and values by helping them see that their assumptions are not confirmed by reality testing, or are actually disconfirmed" (p.387). For meaningful cultural change to occur, it must be viewed as an incremental versus a radical restructuring of the culture. Therefore, this incremental approach to change would allow for the least resistance to change.

Reflection in, on and about action helps make our thinking about action more explicit through a continuous process of reflection in, on and about experiences or practices in which we are engaged. In proposals for the reform of schooling, radical reformers of one persuasion tend to think of teachers as helpless reproducers of inequitable social structures, and radical reformers of another persuasion tend to think of teachers as conformists unwilling to

implement new ideas, policies, and programs. Connelly and Clandinin (1989) in Teachers As Curriculum Planners celebrate the experience of each and every one of us who teach. We now understand how spirited teachers may revolutionize their practices through reflection on their own experiences, and how they can transform new ideas into powerful curriculum programs through this reflective process. In the words of teachers with whom they have worked, reflection on their own narratives of experience has helped them make meaning of their lives as teachers. As we learn to listen to teachers we realize ways that each of us keeps telling and retelling stories about our past. This is a process of living out the stories we tell ourselves in order to make meaning of our experience. Just as teachers reap rewards from this process so do administrators.

As administrators reflect on improvement projects they come to understand that teaching has to be grounded in the teachers' purposes, the kinds of experiences we have had, and the kinds of people we have become. One way to retrieve the grounds of our teaching is to write personal autobiographies or life histories of our growth and development as teachers. Writing and studying these autobiographies or narratives of our experience can provide excellent opportunities for personal refection, for reexamining our purposes, and for identifying how we can and want to change (Goodson 1991, Connelly and Clandinin, 1988; Raymond, Butt and Townsend, 1991). Sharing autobiographies with other teachers can

provide an audience and stimulus for writing and also sources of questioning and interpretation that encourage the writers to reflect more deeply on their motivations and purposes.

Although not taking from the importance of collective reflection as a source of school improvement, Storr (1988) makes a case for the power and necessity of solitude. Interpersonal relationships he argued, do not constitute the only path toward personal fulfilment. The capacity to be alone is a sign of great emotional maturity, "linked with self discovery and self - realization; with becoming aware of our deepest needs, feelings and impulses" (p.21). Storr talks of how solitude can be a source of personal meaning and creativity. New personal meaning is at the heart of successful innovation, especially under circumstances of frequent change. The capacity to be alone is a valuable resource when changes of mental attitude are required. After major alterations in circumstances, fundamental reappraisal of the significance and meaning of existence may be needed. In a culture in which interpersonal relationships are generally considered to provide the answer to every form of distress, it is sometimes difficult to persuade well-meaning helpers that solitude can be as therapeutic as emotional support (Storr, 1988:28). Learning, thinking, innovation and maintaining contact with one's own inner world are all facilitated by solitude (p.28). As one engages in interactive professionalism, it is essential that professional development

and change be grounded in some inner reflection and processing. Otherwise, we can too easily become alienated from our own deepest needs and feelings (Storr, 1988:28).

Solitude, personal development and individual creativity are critical. Sorting out one's own individual stance towards improvement is just as important as deciding on collective responses. The value of fresh insight and expertise and of some individual diversity is not always reflected in our promotion practices which tend to reward the loyal and faithful of our school system against contenders from elsewhere. We must experiment and discover better ways of working together that mobilize the powers of the group while at the same time enhancing individual development. Collegiality must be used, not to level people down, but to bring them together in strength and creativity. Collaborative autobiography emphasises both individual and collaborative reflection.

Leadership Style

Leithwood (1992) stated that instructional leadership served schools throughout the 1980s and early 1990s and instructional leadership can no longer capture what school administration has to become to address the needs of the 1990s. The term "transformational leadership" evokes a more appropriate image of what administrative practice is. This form of leadership is according to Roberts (1985):

> The collective action that's transforming leadership ...empowers those who participate in the process. There is hope, there is optimism, there is energy. In essence, transforming leadership is a leadership that facilitates the redefinition of a people's mission and vision, a renewal of their commitment, and the restructuring of their systems for goal accomplishment (p.9).

Transformational and transactional leadership practices are often viewed as complementary. Transactional leadership practices, some believe, help people recognize what needs to be done to reach a goal and increase their confidence and motivation. Transactional leadership, Sergiovanni (1990) and Bass (1987) stated is essential in maintaining the organizational - getting day-to-day routines carried out. While transformational leadership provides the incentive for people to attempt improvements in their practices, transactional leadership puts the ideas into motion.

Although little empirical evidence is available about the nature and consequences of these two forms of leadership, Leithwood (1992, p.9) in three studies concluded that transformational leadership: 1) helped staff members develop and maintain a collaborative supportive culture, 2) fostered teacher development, and 3) helped the staff solve problems together more effectively.

In maintaining collaborative school cultures, staff members have begun to talk, observe, critique and plan

together. In the study conducted by Leithwood and Jantzi (1991, p.10) of twelve schools working on school improvement, a number of strategies were identified that included staff members involved in collaborative goal setting and reducing teacher's isolation by creating time for joint planning. In fostering teacher development, Leithwood (1992, p.9) suggested that teachers' motivation for development was enhanced when teachers adopted a set of internalized goals for professional growth. This occurred when teachers were involved in establishing a school mission to which they were strongly committed. When staff worked on improving group problem solving, it helped staff members work smarter, not harder (Leithwood and Steinback, 1991 p.9). Leaders solved problems in collaboration with teachers during staff meetings and sought different interpretations of the problem. Open discussions were welcomed and the principal shared a genuine belief that the staff could develop better solutions than the principal could alone, a belief not shared by the nontransformational leaders.

Is there hard evidence that transformational leadership makes a significant difference? In some of the studies conducted by Leithwood (1992, p.11) in 47 schools highly significant relationships were developed between aspects of transformational leadership and teacher's own reports of changes in both attitudes toward school improvement and instructional behaviour. Although the evidence regarding the

effects of transformational leadership is limited it is positive and more research is recommended.

Difficulties That Principals Face

Barth (1990, p.65) stated that more than ever before principals today are facing many stresses; these include their authority being shared with school improvement teams that include teachers, parents and students. Other stressors are that teachers now want more control of their working conditions and more say in their classrooms, the public is demanding more evidence that educational programs are having desired impacts, government legislation is placing new demands on principal's time, all accompanied with dwindling resources for staffing and new programs which have meant that principals must do more with less. Other problems include the number of immigrants coming to the school and the need to provide services for them that are not available elsewhere.

Barth (1990 p.65) reported that in the United States 2/3 of the 100,000 principals intend to quit or retire by the turn of the century. It appears that the best principals are abandoning their positions due to excessive time demand, stress (emotional health), heavy work load, desire for change, fatigue, lack of support, courts, lack of teacher professionalism, student discipline and student apathy. To counter these many stresses some things have to be done differently.

Barth (1990, p.66) suggested that the preservice professional training of principals should be strengthened, there should be improvement in the process of selecting principals and thirdly there should be an increase in professional development opportunities for practising principals. These three notions all involve building a community of learners for principals both in their personal and professional lives. As school districts have in the past tried to divide and conquer the strength of principal groups, the time has come for principals to bind together as a united force and support and affirm each other.

Some Problems In Creating Collaborative Culture

Working as a team is needed now in schools more than ever before as schools try to react to these pressures. Fullan and Hargreaves (1991, p.57) stated that effective collaboration is not easy and brings both difficulty and discomfort on occasion. Warm, nurturing relationships are important to create trust and openness in order to create more challenging collaborative cultures. Effective collaboration operates in the world of ideas, examining existing practices critically, seeking better alternatives and working hard together at bringing about improvement. Not all forms of collaboration are helpful towards change. Some forms of collaboration that Fullan (1991, p.52) believed one should be watchful of are balkanization, comfortable collaboration, and contrived

collegiality.

The term balkanization as described by Fullan (1991) referred to a type of collaborative culture which is made up of separate and competing groups jockeying for position and supremacy. This type of collaboration leads to poor communication, indifference, or groups going their separate ways in a school. Balkanized cultures can be found in high schools, with a strong subject department but also within elementary schools at the same grade level or division. To improve this situation principals have encouraged the regular working together of different subject area groups to understand each others' viewpoint and also to encourage teacher development that is inseparable from curriculum development.

Another problem with creating collaborative cultures is contrived collegiality. Due to the unpredictability of collaborative cultures, Fullan and Hargreaves (1991, p.58) wrote that some administrators may attempt to control or regulate cultures. Contrived cultures Hargreaves (1989) characterized as formal, specific, bureaucratic procedures to increase attention given to joint teacher planning, consultation and other forms of working together. Some compulsory forms of clinical supervision where assistance is bound to evaluation are imposed forms of collegiality. Fullan and Hargreaves (1991, p.61) do admit that there is a real challenge in developing and sustaining collaborative cultures

over long periods of time, and that contrived collegiality may be used by administrators to facilitate, not in a controlling way but as a starting point, and a necessary first step toward building collaborative cultures with focus and depth. It must not become the substitute for strong collaborative cultures that take time, patience and skill to evolve and develop.

School Culture

Bates (1992, p.13) talked about four notions important to a school culture: pedagogy, curriculum, assessment and discipline. He saw pedagogy as a mechanism through which character and virtue are produced. Greenfield (1973) captured this idea when he observed that:

> What many people seem to want from schools is that schools reflect the values that are central and meaningful in their lives. If this view is correct, schools are cultural artifacts that people struggle to shape in their own image. Only in such forms do they have faith in them; only in such forms can they participate comfortably in them. (p.570)

In such a culture Giddens (1991, p.224) stated that pedagogy would relate the personal to the global, addressing issues of personal choice and collective problems in environment, biological reproduction and the continuing degradation of the third world, that is a pedagogy which carries a new vision of character and virtue.

For Bates (1992, p.16), curriculum carried the second message system on the culture of the school. Bernstein (1990) presented a new focus on curriculum when he said:

> There is a new concept both of knowledge and of its relation to those who create it, a truly secular concept. Knowledge should flow like money to wherever it can create advantage and profit. Indeed, knowledge is not just like money: it is money. Knowledge is divorced from persons, their commitments, their personal dedication, for these become impediments, restrictions on flow and introduce deformations into the working of the market. Moving knowledge about, or even creating it, should not be more difficult than moving and regulating money. Knowledge, after nearly a thousand years, is divorced from inwardness and is literally dehumanized. Once knowledge is separated from inwardness, commitment and personal dedication, then people may be moved about, substituted for each other, and excluded from the market.... Now we have a dislocation, which permits the creation of two independent markets, one of knowledge and another of knowers. (p.155)

Bates (1992, p.17) believed assessment was the third mechanism through which school culture is articulated. At times assessment has contradictory purposes. It can assist teachers and pupils regarding things which pupils do and do not know and those things that they wish and do not wish to know.

Assessment then assists the teacher to understand both pedagogy and curriculum more clearly. But assessment also serves management in that it is a means of surveillance which subordinates teachers and pupils to administrative ends.

The fourth mechanism of school culture is discipline. Bates (1992, p.18) believed that discipline used in schools was based on administrative hierarchy where individuals are controlled by power. Therefore discipline as Bates (1992, p.18) described was linked with surveillance for teachers as well as students, and different from discipline based on meaning, beliefs, values, aspirations and judgements of more deeply personal and wider social significance.

As Hodgkinson (1991) and Sergiovanni (1992) stated leadership involves the making and articulating of choices, the location of oneself within the cultural struggles of the times as cultural battles of the school in society. It is important that as leaders we be conscious of the choices we make, the battles we choose to wage and we do so with the models of virtue and goodness at the core of our being.

Collaborative Culture

In any discussion of community, the culture of the school is an important aspect. Deal (1985) noted "cultures grow through human interaction; thereafter they shape human experience" (p.605). Fullan and Hargreaves (1991, p.12) stated the challenge for administrators is to develop in

schools what might be called interactive professionalism where teachers as a group are allowed greater powers of discretion in making decisions with and on behalf of the children they know best. Teachers make these decisions with their colleagues in collaborative cultures of help and support.

Current leadership research makes the connection between leadership and culture. In developing a meaningful culture, leaders attempt to motivate workers, enhance the meaning of their work, and give excitement and significance to their work life.

Morgan (1986) stated more democratic leaders allow the reality of the situation to evolve from definitions by their colleagues, listening to what is said and summoning and integrating key themes. By using these strategic interventions leaders communicate key directions and a sense of value, rather than forcing people to follow their lead. Leaders then play a background role, shaping the action and the general direction that events will take but leaving choice about details to those responsible for implementation.

To develop in a school a culture of shared leadership, Lieberman (1988) found that teachers must have opportunities to take on more responsibilities, have more decision-making power and more accountability for the results (p.4). To form an organization in which leadership is broadly distributed among both administrators and teachers requires the administrators "to make the school larger than one person."

Sergiovanni (1987) stated that leadership activities associated with the development of culture include "articulating school purposes and mission; socializing new members to the school; telling stories and maintaining or reinforcing myths and beliefs; developing and displaying a system of symbols over time; and rewarding those who reflect this culture"(p.58). Lieberman (1988) believed that shared leadership, by which administrators and teachers engage in the development of meaningful culture in a collaborative manner appears to be rare in education.

She suggested that joint teacher decisions will extend beyond sharing of resources, ideas and other immediate practicalities to critical reflection on the purpose and value of what teachers teach and how. Such teachers are committed to norms of continuous improvement in their school. They are more fundamentally accountable as they open their classroom doors and engage in dialogue, action and assessment of their work with other adults inside and outside their schools. To build strong cultures in schools we must improve the basic working conditions and lives of teachers as these in turn affect the learning of students.

Improving teachers and schools is the key to enhancing learning. Morgan (1986) stated that organizational cultures tend to be either a tight-knit team or family that believes in working together, or one that is highly fragmented and divided into groups that think about the world in very

different ways, and have different aspirations of what their organization should be. The development of a culture in an organization takes many years of working through problems and may take years to evolve. When a culture does develop, the workers have a sense of personal importance and significance.

Barth (1990, p.131) concluded that all teachers can lead. The vision for a school is a place whose very mission is to ensure that students, parents, teachers and principals all become school leaders in some ways and at some time. Leadership is making the things happen that you believe in or envision. According to Morgan, culture is always evolving. At any given time it can be seen as having a discernible pattern, e.g., reflecting an ethos of competition or cooperation, dominance or equality, seriousness or playfulness; This pattern is an abstraction imposed on the culture from the outside.

Administrators can influence the evolution of culture by being aware of the symbolic consequences of their action and by attempting to foster desired values, but they can never control culture in the sense that many management writers advocate. Several scholars have written on school cultures that liberate teachers and students. John Dewey (1916) believed that classrooms must become places that support the freeing of intelligence for all who work there. He stated that this philosophy would permit every member of the school system "from the first grade teacher to the principal of the

high school to share in the exercise of educational power"(p.106). He believed that the limiting of the mind to mastery of ready-made material is a violation of a principle of moral self-directing individuality. Dewey (1916) made this forceful remark in Democracy and Education:

> how one person's abilities compare in quantity with those of another is none of the teacher's business. It is irrelevant to his work. What is required is that every individual shall have opportunities to employ his own powers in activities that have meaning. (p.203)

He believed that in teacher-student relations, and collegial relations, teaching required open communication. If learning is to have an inquiry emphasis for students, than teachers need freedom to be inquirers in the process of their own work. Another scholar, Goodlad (1979,1983), refused to accept the reductionist theory of schooling that called for precisely delineated measured goals. Goodlad (1983) emphasized in the Study of Schooling "that teachers, students, and parents in the school studied want more than is implied by the words of intellectual development"(p.61). He noted that "they wanted some reasonably balanced attention to intellectual, social, vocational, and personal emphases in the school's program of studies"(p.62). Goodlad (1983) viewed the healthy school as having a sense of mission, unity, identity, and wholeness that pervades every aspect of the school. People connected with

this school have a sense of ownership; of belonging to a special place. The principal, according to Goodlad (1979), is "central to the development of a sense of mission, unity, and pride in the school"(p.346). In effective schools, the principal is a person with a strong sense of personal worth, who takes a position on issues, and is not cornered by strong individuals or groups within the community.

Glasser (1990) also offered some suggestions on how to develop supportive cultures for learning in schools. Effective teachers recognize that the effort to indoctrinate students with measurable fragments of knowledge has little, or nothing to do, with high quality education. In quality schools, Glasser (1990) believed the students are continually asked for their input regarding better ways to learn. The teacher is the facilitator in that he or she tries to show the students that everything feasible has been done to provide them, with the best possible tools and work place, as well as a non-coercive and cooperative atmosphere to learn. This type of "good work" in schools allows students to participate in the process, to decide what occurs, and also enables them to evaluate their work. It helps to instill a sense of pride in the students' accomplishments.

Paulo Friere (1974) wrote of what it means to be human and to have a "good education", when he described education as a process to integrate, not adapt, to treat students as subjects not objects, and to dialogue, not monologue in class.

Sergiovanni (1987) defined empowerment as the distribution of power among others. The concept of empowerment looks at the need to delegate or surrender control over others. Teachers in a school system need to be given the power to act, the necessary responsibility that releases their potential and makes their actions and decisions count. Lieberman (1988) stated that the best way to lead is to empower others, so that all members can participate in the shaping of values and goals, and in the setting of procedures for attaining the goals.

Rosenholtz (1989) observed in effective schools, collaboration is linked with norms and with opportunities for continuous improvement and career-long learning: "It is assumed that improvement in teaching is a collective rather than individual enterprise, and that analysis, evaluation, and experimentation in concert with colleagues are conditions under which teachers improve" (p.73). Lieberman (1986) believed that by working in collaborative situations, teachers are exposed to new ideas, and by working on problems collectively, they learn from the very people who understand the complexity of their work best - their colleagues. This is similar to Sergiovanni's (1987) reference to "leadership density" as the extent to which leadership roles are shared and the extent to which leadership is broadly exercised (p.342). Lieberman (1988) stated empowerment is the act of extending the instructional leadership beyond oneself to

enable the leadership potential within the school community to work on its behalf. She believed that "if there is to be a community of leaders in a school, teachers must have opportunities to take on more responsibilities, more decision-making power, and more accountability for the results, (and) be paid higher salaries, in recognition of the complexity and significance of their work" (p.649). Sergiovanni (1987) stated that the greater the leadership density in a school, the greater the school's capacity to translate intention into action. Wirth (1983) also concluded that employees' involvement and participation in decision making in an organization gave them the feeling that they are doing useful work and have a sense of responsibility, and more opportunities for challenge become avoidable.

At the school level teachers in some schools have opportunities to plan curriculum and do collaborative work. Lieberman (1988) suggested that collaborative work at the school level may take many forms that may range from teachers taking each other's class to school improvement teams or projects with a school or district. For collaborative work to be successful, people who work together need not only have good ideas, but require time to become a cohesive group. Lieberman (1988) also believed that most of us have learned to be more protective than reflective, more understanding of people like us than of those who are different and more comfortable in our own context than someone else's. Ashton

and Webb (1986) found that the main benefit of collaboration is that it can reduce teachers' sense of powerlessness and increase their sense of efficacy. Little (1990) observed that joint work is the strongest form of collaboration (eg. team teaching, planning, observation, action research, sustained peer coaching, and mentoring etc.). Joint work implied and created stronger interdependence, shared responsibility, collective commitment and improvement, and greater readiness to participate in the difficult business of review and critique. This, according to Little, is the kind of collaborative work and culture most likely to lead to significant improvement.

Collaborative cultures create and sustain more satisfying and productive work environments. By empowering teachers and reducing the uncertainties of the job that must otherwise be faced in isolation, collaborative cultures also raise student achievement. Collaborative cultures facilitate commitment to change and improvement. They also create communities of teachers who no longer have the dependent relationships to externally imposed change that isolation and uncertainty tend to encourage. In collaborative cultures, teachers develop the collective confidence to respond to change critically, selecting and adapting those elements that will aid improvement in their work context, and rejecting those that will not. Collaborative cultures acknowledge and give voice to the teacher's purpose. Ironically, disagreement is

stronger and more frequent in schools with collaborative cultures than it is elsewhere, as purposes, values and their relationship to practice are discussed. But this disagreement is possible due to secure staff relationships that allow openness in discussion and temporary disagreement, in the knowledge that continuing relationships will not be threatened by it. Collaboration is a slow process when one works with a diverse group of teachers, but given time, encouragement and support, it can enrich a school and make it an exciting, learning environment for students. Wirth (1983) also concluded "that we have to begin to treat all people whether in a company or in a school or in any other institution, as adult human beings and not as children, and involve them in decisions that affect their lives"(p.56).

Values as an Aspect of Culture

Within a school, values play an important part in the development of a supportive culture for students and teachers. Sergiovanni (1987) believed "all of us in both our work and professional lives want to know what is of value, desire a sense of order and direction, and enjoy sharing that sense with others" (p.340). When an organization has a clear sense of its direction and desired future state, the sharing of this image helps individuals to have a sense of ownership. This direction can instill a purpose to their work, and the workers tend to see themselves as being part of a worthwhile

enterprise.

Integrity is an important aspect of any organization. By valuing honesty in words and actions, people in organizations demonstrate a strong commitment to the highest personal and ethical considerations. To say that an organization has integrity is to say that it is built on a foundation of trust, that is solid with all parts of the organization working with some degree of harmony. The organization says what it means, and means what it says. This is accomplished by the actions that an organization such as a school takes in for example the importance placed on the needs of students and teachers. Are their voices being heard in the organization? or Are the voices of the rich areas in a school district more strongly heard and responded to than the poorer areas in a school district?

In schools, as Van Manen (1986) stated what is of value is that teachers make every effort to experience and understand the total child. Wirth (1983) discussed some important values needed in schools noting the goal of schools:

> ...requires helping people to get in touch with the full range of their powers as whole persons: the power to see what is there, to project ideas, to risk confrontation, to express trust and anger and fear, to gain insight into personal and institutional histories and their effects, to act to make reasoned change. To establish these values

> requires building communities of learners marked by respect for individuality and dialogue. (p.182)

What should be of value in schools is the view expressed by scholars like Wirth (1983) when he spoke of education as a liberating experience. "Good work" in education can only exist when democracy exists. Democracy exists, not only to allow individuals to participate in deciding what occurs and is of value to them, but also to allow them the freedom to develop and embellish talents and abilities to acquire and expand knowledge. In his book Inviting School Success, Purkey (1984) referred to some values needed for effective education as being actioned by "invitational education." Invitational education is perceptually based, a self concept approach to the educative process and professional functioning that centres on four basic principles: people are able, valuable, and responsible and should be treated accordingly; teaching should be a cooperative activity potential in all areas of human development; this potential can best be realized by places, policies, and programs that are specifically designed to invite development; and by people who are personally and professionally inviting to themselves and others (p.2).

Invitational education is therefore the process by which people are valued and summoned to realize their relatively boundless potential.

If a school is organized as a machine, the values of integrity, trust, the view of education as a liberating

experience, and the worth of the individual have difficulty being realized. Administrators of organizations need to adopt a human-centred focus. If, as it should, what is of value in an organization is the development and growth of the individual and society, organizations would be better structured as organisms as the importance of values in visions and cultures are recognized.

The Leader's Role In A Collaborative Culture

There has been an evolution of the school leader from building manager, instructional leader to transformational leader. There have been new expectations added to the role of school leader with school-based management, choice, vision, and community involvement in schools. Added to this is a number of new instructional approaches: interdisciplinary teaming and teaching, cooperative learning, literature, and primary source instruction, writing process across the curriculum, theme approaches to content areas, and authentic assessment. Due to all these new demands Poplin (1992, p.10) stated that administrators need to shed the role of instructional leader and assume new roles like those of entrepreneurs.

Appointing administrators as instructional leaders proved to be rather problematic. Poplin (1992, p.10) believed that many great administrators were not great classroom teachers (and vice versa) so appointing administrators as instructional leaders worked to the detriment of teachers. Due to the many

demands of the job the best form of instruction became direct instruction. It was perceived as orderly, hierarchical, provided closure and was easily observed and evaluated.

Today teachers are encouraged to go beyond the old forms of transmission models of instruction. Poplin (1992, p.10) stated that leaders are encouraged to participate more in school management: develop their own visions and decide how time and money are spent. Instructional leadership has outlived its usefulness, administrators need to help develop collective vision, be guardians of the vision, encourage others, be problem solvers and resource finders. Lee (1991) noted a new approach for administrators to use to improve school practices that would allow the school community: a) to examine the meanings they give to their experiences and b) to consider how these meanings influence the way they carry out their work. For administrators to engage in sense-making with respect to their work, administrators must adopt such an approach themselves. They must develop as Lee (1991) noted their own capacity to engage in conscious reflection and interpretation - becoming more aware and articulate about the sense they make of their own work and serve as models of professional behaviour for the staff.

Lee (1991) believed that instructional leadership concentrated more on the growth of students and rarely looked at the growth of teachers. Deci and Ryan (1985) concluded that we are motivated through a sense of competence, control

and connection. Poplin (1992, p.11) referred to the learning theory that tells us that we grow as we increase our knowledge and create new meanings. Critical theory suggests that there is an advancement in community growth by promoting critical dialogue. Feminist theory suggests that growth happens in conjunction with others to whom we feel connected and for whom we care.

For administrators to change their mode of operation from instructional leader to sense-making mode, they may be required to seek out professional development activities that promote a more reflective stance. Administrators can examine their own practice and consider ways they can make sense of their own leadership and of the organization of teaching and learning in their schools.

From such an experience of understanding who they are, administrators who want to promote teacher growth will understand the importance of self evaluation and enable teachers to articulate their dreams for classroom instruction, climate, curriculum, their assessments of students. Self evaluation allows teachers to become their own instructional leaders and administrators become their aides, locators of resources, and organizers of opportunities to further enhance innovative instruction.

To engage a staff in the process of shared decision making processes, Lee (1991) noted that the administrator has to acknowledge the teachers as professional colleagues and

treat them as such. A climate of mutual respect is essential for groups of individuals to examine their own work and engage in shared inquiry (Barnet, 1988, 1990). Lee (1991) suggested that from the process of sense-making the climate allows for multiple points of view to be expressed and examined thoughtfully. Professionals listen carefully to each other and help each other articulate ideas. It is important that the administrator create regular opportunities for teachers to engage in conversation about their work around issues and problems of practice. As mentioned earlier for administrators to incorporate sense-making into their work with teachers, they must engage in the process of reflection and interpretation themselves. In the future "Principals will be asked to lead in schools where complex dilemmas require definition long before the search for solutions begins for themselves and for those who work in the schools they administer - is a critical function of leadership". (P. 30).

In the development of collaborative cultures principals can be instrumental in implementing particular innovations though direct monitoring and support, but schools are not in the business of managing single innovations; principals need to contend with multiple innovations simultaneously, (Fullan, 1992). Instead of principals imposing their individual visions, they would do well to develop collaborative work cultures to help staff deal with all these innovations. Rather than principals imposing their own individual visions,

Fullan (1992, p.49) concluded that principals would do well to develop collaborative work cultures to help staff deal with all these innovations. In order to build collaborative work cultures, principals must concentrate on fostering vision-building, norms of collegiality that respect individuality, continuous improvement, problem - coping and conflict resolution strategies, lifelong teacher development that involves inquiry, reflective practice, collaboration and technical skills; and restructuring initiatives (Fullan 1990, Fullan and Hargreaves 1991).

Eight general guidelines for the complex task of working interactively with teachers and communities are:

1. Understand the culture of the school before you try to change it.
2. Value your teachers, promote their professional development.
3. Extend what you value.
4. Express what you value.
5. Promote collaboration, not cooptation
6. Make menus, not mandates.
7. Use bureaucratic means to facilitate, not to constrain.
8. Connect with the wider environment.

(Fullan and Hargreaves, 1991 p.84)

Schein (1985) stated that the only thing of real importance that leaders do is to create and manage culture but

this process of developing collaborative work cultures is complex. School leaders need to express their own values without being imposing, draw out others' values and concerns, manage conflict and problem solving and be open at the same time.

The principal in such a culture should strive not to be an instructional leader, but rather a leader of instructional leaders (Glickman 1991, p. 7). He or she is not responsible for one vision but is responsible for making vision-building a collective exercise. An alternative to vision - driven reform is learning as well as leading through collaboration. If one vision does exist it is for teachers to work together to press for and support improvements.

The literature on leadership confirms the importance that the leaders in the schools have a good understanding of their own administrative philosophy and have a sense of purpose in what they want their schools to become. The principal is the central figure in determining the quality of a school. As administrators engaging in school based improvement and working to create collaborative cultures, it is important that they have a good understanding of their own personal and professional practices when engaging a staff on a school improvement initiative. The process of collaborative autobiography allows administrators the opportunity to reflect with other colleagues on their professional practices and philosophy both in their personal and professional lives and

from this knowledge come to a better understanding of how to develop and promote supportive collaborative cultures in their schools. From this experience of professional growth and renewal with other colleagues, administrators may see the importance of teachers forming collaborative cultures to grow both personally and professionally. As an administrator, collaborative autobiography provided me with a tool to promote and develop a collaborative culture among teachers and helped to facilitate school based improvement projects.

Life History as a Research Method

In deciding on a research methodology for my study, I drew from my own administrative background. Having been in high needs schools for seven out of my eleven years as a principal, my interest was focused on dealing with relationships and building supportive school environments for students and teachers. I have always believed the importance of understanding both the personal and professional past in understanding the total person.

Notion of Reflection

The concept of "reflective practitioner" has been pioneered by Donald Schon (1987, 1989), as a way of describing and developing skills and thoughtful judgement in professions like teaching. It has quickly gained popularity in education as a rationale for moving teacher educators and staff

developers beyond mind-sets focused on rather narrow forms of training, to ones embracing wider processes of thoughtful education -- not just in the sense of ivory-towered contemplation, but in ways that link reflection directly to practice (e.g., Grimmett and Erickson, 1988).

As Young (1989) concluded, autobiographical research in the social sciences has not been frequently used in North America. Young (1989) also stated that a variety of labels have been used to describe biographical research. In the social sciences, the terms may include "life cycle", "life document", "life story", "life history", and "social life history". Young (1989) believed the use of a particular term in describing a biographical account depends on the author's disciplinary orientation, research process, and to some extent personal preferences.

Bogdan and Biklen (1982, p.61) categorized the life history as a form of case study that focused on the life of one person. They noted that the study may be comprehensive or it may be limited in scope to a particular period or topic. For Butt (1984, p.71), knowing the quality of experienced thought and action makes it possible to disclose what significantly influences what an educator does or does not do. Through examining the transformational quality of significant experiences in personal and professional lives, we can comprehend an educator's formation or development in an educative as well as a training sense.

Bertaux and Kohli (1984) stated that "life story" is an oral, autobiographical narrative of the entire life span or specified aspects of a life generated through interaction. Therefore the only data are accounts provided by the person being studied. The "life history", takes a form of case study: life story interview data are supplemented by other sources such as diaries and letters.

Young (1989) believed that differentiating between life history and life story exposed some epistemological concerns or assumptions underlying a research project. A life history usually has one person as its focus. Becker (1970, p.420) Denzin (1978, p.232), and Plummer (1983, p.14), all believe that the best life histories supplement or corroborate the life story with data from other sources. Bertaux, (1981, p.7-9) noted that an exclusive reliance on life stories is not an inferior but a different research approach. He believed that data from other sources did not necessarily enhance the validity of the first person narrative. Thus Bertaux noted that there is no reason to rank some sources as more reliable or truthful than others.

Researchers who engage in life history value and respect the individual's perspective. Researchers engaging in life history, as Plummer (1983 p.14) concluded, try to obtain a subjective view as much as possible as well as acknowledging that the story is never complete, (Bertaux, 1981, p.8), nor ever really captured in all its totality (Faraday and

Plummer, 1979, p.778). Young (1989) believed that as researchers we have to recognize the life story for what it is and is not. Bertaux (1981) has pressed researchers to view life story as a source of the individual's perspective.

The researcher's involvement in a situation, as interviewer or as participant, influences the definition of the situation because the researcher brings theories and interpretations both as scientist and member of the situation. Bertaux (1981 p.44) welcomed life history researchers to tell their own story. Plummer (1983, p.130) stated that this is important if one believes the researcher to also "construct" their reality as well as discover knowledge. As Mead (1934) concluded, the researcher takes the "role of the other" while simultaneously being in the role of the researcher. The researcher attempts to formalize the "unsaid" portions of the accounts in a theoretical framework that lies behind the process of organizational socialization and career development. Life history accounts document the relationship between an individual and his or her reality, and describe the ways individuals interpret and define the context in which their lives have been acted out and the meaning that participation had for them. In this regard, the methodology struggles to find a balance between the theory in the real world and the theory in the researcher's head.

Autobiography as a Research Method

Autobiography also serves the task of human learning by helping to remember and understand one's personal history from a fresh perspective (Brady, 1990, p.46). Through autobiography, humans can build and order their present by way of remembered past. Bertaux (1981, p.40) stated the activities of data collection, analysis, interpretation cannot be separated. In collaborative autobiography, the interpretation of the data lies with the autobiographer and the identification of major themes, patterns and meaning are his or her prerogative (Butt, 1990, p.8). Each autobiographer initiates and controls the interpretive activity with the researcher as facilitator. Faraday and Plummer (1979, p.790) saw this writing as a memoir and a way of publishing experiences that may have been ignored. Grumet (1987 p. 322-328) saw this returning of the story to the participant a necessary mediation, since the telling of one's story can be alienating.

According to Butt, Raymond and Townsend (1990), the emerging field of "life course" research in education is concerned with understanding the educator's development and school improvement from the perspective of educator's lives and careers. Collaborative autobiography attempts to discern the nature and development of an educator's knowledge as the educator sees it. Although life history data has been used in historical studies and in the field of psychology, it is only

in the last fifteen years that life history has been used for inquiry in the domain of education. Researchers such as Goodson (1981) have used life history to portray the interaction of person and context over time, particularly the press of institutional and social structures in shaping educators' professional lives.

According to Berk (1980), autobiography was one of the first methodologies used for the study of education. Berk (1980) stated there was the decline of the study of the individual as group studies became the major method in psychology. In recent times, Pinar (1988), Grumet (1988), and Pinar and Grumet (1976) developed with their students and others a strong autobiographical tradition in educational studies. Connelly and Clandinin (1990, p.3) concluded that in understanding ourselves and our students educationally, there has to be an understanding of people with a narrative of life experience. Life's narratives are the context or help to make meaning of school situations. Narrative inquiry in educational studies helps bring theoretical ideas as the nature of human life as lived to bear on educational experience as lived.

Of all research methods, Jones (1983) believed that life history research comes closest to allowing the researcher access to how individuals create and portray the social world surrounding them. Life history methodology offers an interpretive framework through which the meaning of human

experience is revealed in personal accounts. This method gives priority to individual explanations of actions rather than to methods that filter and sort responses into predetermined conceptual categories.

Narrative, and especially "self-narrative" (Bruner, 1986, p.11), has come to be seen as another form of thought, a "mode of cognitive functioning" as equally valid and important as cognitive process involved in logical or inductive arguments. Bruner (1986, p.1) stated that autobiography as self narrative not only works as a distinctive way of ordering experience, but is an "irreducible" method of construing reality.

Connelly and Clandinin (1990, p.2) believed that the study of narrative in educational research is based on the belief that humans are storytelling organisms who individually and socially lead storied lives. The study of narrative is an account of the ways humans experience the world. Education is the construction and reconstruction of personal and social stories; teachers and learners are storytellers and characters in their own and other's stories. One of the most frequent criticisms of narrative is that it stresses the individual over social content.

Connelly and Clandinin (1990, p.4) concluded that when both researchers and practitioners tell stories of the research relationship, they become stories of empowerment. Noddings (1986) stated that the necessity of time, relationship, space and voice when establishing the

collaborative relationship. Like other qualitative methods, narrative relies on criteria other than validity, reliability and generalizability. The narrative is a two part inquiry agenda. We need to listen closely to teachers and other learners and to the stories of their lives in and out of classrooms. It is also necessary to tell our own stories as we live our own lives as collaborative researchers/teachers.

Human experience cries out for understanding and interpretation. A central task of human learning is dialoguing with the crucial questions posed by life in order to achieve this understanding. In attempting to look back and interpret events from our personal history, we try to construct order and meaning. Olney (1972) believed there is an essential oneness to the self, an integrity and internal harmony that holds together the multiplicity and continual transformations of being.

It is not proper, nor may it be constructive, to view autobiography as an objective accounting. Every autobiography is a work of art, and at the same time, a work of enlightenment. It does not show us the persons from outside in their visible actions, but as they are in their inner privacy; not as I am, not as I was, but as I believe and wish myself to have been and to be.

Brady (1990, p.50) concluded that it is crucial to stress that learning about oneself through autobiography is not a function of mere self-interest or narcissism. It is an

important and even necessary condition for learning about other human beings. Emerson said that "He then learns that in going down into the secrets of his own mind, he has descended into the secrets of all minds" (quoted in Wacks,1987, p.50). People are intimately connected by sharing a common condition - our humanity. Knowing oneself is an important foundation for relating to, understanding and serving others.

Issues Regarding Autobiography

In any research project there has to be an examination of what in this case autobiography is and is not. Hankiss (1981, p.203) expressed this process in autobiographical narrative as the building of a theory about oneself, or the creation of a personal ontology. There is a danger as expressed by Grumet (1987 p.324) that any single account will become dogmatic or be guided by some significant and undisputed bias.

Gergen & Gergen (1984, p.178-180) also believed that in any narrative the order of events as well as the content of specific incidents following in one direction or a sudden change of direction has some dramatic impact. A focus on certain events rather than others will create a rather dramatic effect (p.182). This raises the complex question of distinguishing fact from fiction.

When sharing a narrative, Butt and Raymond (1990, p.20) concluded, autobiographical data are subject to incompleteness, personal bias and selective recall.

Similarly, Grumet (1987, p.321) pointed out that "even telling a story is a risky business" that may be coloured by time constraints, mood within the group and fallibility of memory. Grumet (1987) expressed it this way: "Every telling is a partial prevarication.... Our stories are the masks through which we can be seen, and with every telling we stop the flood and swirl of thought so some one can get a glimpse of us, and maybe catch us if they can" (p.322). Grumet (1987) contended that our experience becomes meaningful as we reflect on it although as Butt (1990) pointed out, this process that allows us to make sense of ourselves in our own terms can be viewed by others as narcisstic and solipsistic.

To address these concerns Butt & Raymond (1988, p.5) suggested that within the group discussing their stories a trust is built so that the authenticity of others can help to encourage participants to unmask themselves and disclose their problems. Participants then do reveal personal flaws and take responsibility for their own stories. Grumet (1987) rejected the image of monitoring in favour of more collaborative exploration. Her example is that the researchers should tell the participant "what the question is looking for" (1987, p.24). Thus the researcher and the participants are co-participants in this research. Grumet believed that the researcher gives direction by the formulation of questions at first.

In collaborative autobiography Butt, Townsend and

Raymond (1990) believed that the process of starting from the present and following leads back in the past does stimulate recall of both personal and professional experiences. Being exposed to other's life histories assists memory, as do the questions we ask of one other. Being surrounded by people telling their life histories within the shared context of education probes the blank spaces of our selective recall and repression of certain areas.

Autobiography and Teachers' Working Knowledge

Butt (1984) first elaborated arguments for using biography/autobiography as a means for understanding the personal nature of teachers' knowledge. Later, Clandinin and Connelly (1986) and Schubert (1988) echoed these arguments emphasising that teachers' knowledge is best conceptualized as formative process and thus approached through biographical means of inquiry. Later, Butt and Raymond developed means for conducting autobiographical research (Butt, Raymond, Yamagishi, 1988; Raymond and Surprenant, 1988). Brady (1990, p.47) suggested that autobiography and self-knowledge are an important means to learning because they enable the person to interpret his or her life into a kind of whole. An examination of one's thoughts and feelings which is limited to the present moment will give one only a fragmentary sense of one's personal living.

Butt, Townsend and Raymond (1990) stated there are at

least six clusters of life course inquiry into teaching. Huberman (Huberman and Shapera, 1979, 1983, Huberman, 1984, 1987, 1988), and his colleagues have attempted to understand the "phases" of professional development by examining the needs, interest and concerns of teachers in their career. This life cycle research, examines the understanding of teacher development and looks at school improvement and staff development. Their work examines teachers' careers and focuses on the professional aspects of teachers' lives - Ingvarson and Greenway (1984) and Newman and his colleagues (1979, 1980a, 1990b) have portrayed teacher development and Guskey (1985) has examined the interaction of career and staff development.

Butt, et al. (1990) wrote that Goodson (1981), Ball and Goodson (1985), Sikes (1985), Woods (1985), Sikes, Measor and Woods (1986), Woods and Sikes (1987) all emphasized the conditions under which teachers work. In these studies attention is paid to studying the interaction of person and content of their work over time in shaping the teachers' professional lives. Their work focused more on professional life and less on teachers' private lives.

Butt et al. (1990) stated that Hargreave's research (1986, Chapter 8, 9, 10) delved more into the cultural contents within which individual teachers' lives evolve. Teacher biographies assist in understanding particular cultures in teaching. The teacher's individual and collective

contributions are important to the culture. Smith (1986, p.87) also did studies of collective biography within a specific culture and this work portrays individual concerns in greater balance with collective cultural concerns related to innovation and change.

Butt et al. (1990) stated that the work of Pinar and Grumet (1976) Pinar (1978, 1980, 1981, 1986, 1988) and Grumet (1980) emphasized the understanding of one's private self and its relationship to one's more "public teaching self". Butt et al. (1990) noted that the process of the teacher's self-understanding is a vehicle for personal emancipation and professional development, self understanding as coordinating mutual understanding. Krall (1981, 1982,1988) became involved in ethnographic, phenomenological and hermeneutic approaches. Just as these researchers discuss teacher self understanding, I once again believe the importance of principals coming to a better understanding of self.

Butt and Raymond (1990, p.5) are interested in the nature and development of the knowledge that teachers hold and use. The process of autobiographical writing is emancipating and assists in teacher development. This same process of autobiographical writing would also help administrators come to a better understanding of self and their staffs in working on school improvement.

Overview of This Study

This literature review of school improvement, leadership, life history and autobiography has provided a foundation for the importance of looking at the personal and professional lives of administrators when engaging in school improvement projects.

To gather these stories the process of collaborative autobiography as developed by Butt (1989, 1990) was used with a group of seven principals. A selection process was used, not a sampling process; potentially contrasting stories were sought and my analytical activities were done as I went along the process and also upon completion (Bertraum, 1981,p.37-38). The participants were of a similar age, although this was loosely defined, and participants had similar and different experiences, attitudes and behaviours. Veroff (1984) confirmed that historical and age effects were also important. The narrative drafted upon completion of the process of collaborative autobiography (Butt, Raymond and Townsend, 1989, 1990) was submitted to each participant for validation and review, and was the basis for further analysis. In writing my thesis, it was written in a narrative form. (Bertaux, 1981 p.44).

CHAPTER TWO

THE METHODOLOGY OF COLLABORATIVE AUTOBIOGRAPHY

Preface

In this chapter I will review my own interest in autobiography and oral history, my experience with the process of collaborative autobiography, and the pilot studies which I conducted and which helped confirm my decision to do the autobiographical study with a group of principals. This is followed by the details of the design and procedures of the study. There is a review of the purpose of the study and a review of autobiography as a research methodology with a detailed account of the process of collaborative autobiography as developed by Butt and Raymond (1989, 1990). This includes the four topics of working reality, pedagogy, personal and professional past and aspirations for the future including how the topics, timelines, and schedules for presentations were arranged for this study.

The second phase of the methodology discussed is the design and specifics of the study where collaborative themes were identified by the researcher and brought back to the group in written form for them to question, discuss and revise if necessary. Upon completing all four topics of the autobiographical process, each participant's narrative was transcribed from the recording session, returned to the

participant for verification and revisions were made when and where necessary. This was part of the data analysis.

My Interest In Autobiography

Coming from a strong Irish and Scottish heritage I grew up with the rich stories of my grandparents and parents and the people they met and knew. For me as a child these interesting stories always wove a magical spell and cultivated an interest in people's life stories.

In my professional career as a teacher and as an administrator I have tried to know and understand a person's background in order to understand the individual better and to work together more effectively. As a teacher with students from a wide range of backgrounds, I have taken the time to know and understand the students in my care so that I might be a more effective teacher. Understanding students' backgrounds and problems both at home and school has helped me to address their individual needs.

In doing graduate course work at the University of Alberta, a summer writing course in collaborative autobiography was suggested to me by my adviser. That course offered me an opportunity to reflect on my personal and professional life and I welcomed the opportunity for self examination which could lead to improvement as I have always believed that the answers are within each of us. My other experience in collaborative autobiography was co-teaching a

graduate course in autobiography and teaching a qualitative methodology course at the graduate level, using aspects of collaborative autobiography to demonstrate to the students how to conduct a qualitative research study.

In these experiences, I observed and helped students reflect on their experiences and learn and grow from them. I believed that collaborative autobiography had great potential for teachers working together in schools to improve the learning environment for students and as an administrator I felt that this process had great possibilities for use with a group of administrators as well.

Before engaging in this research with a group of administrators I ran two pilot studies to gain confidence and understanding of my research project. The first pilot study was with a school administrator who was a student in the collaborative autobiographical course I was teaching. The goal for me as the researcher was to engage the participant in talking about some vignettes in her professional working environment and some personal experiences. I tape recorded these sessions over four hours, transcribed the tapes, identified themes and kept a journal of each meeting. I brought back the themes to the participant to verify and change where necessary. At the conclusion I asked what had she learned from these sessions about being an administrator and whether there were things that she would look at changing in her professional and personal life. She responded by

saying that the sessions had helped her realize that she really didn't want to be an administrator and didn't enjoy the job and hoped that her graduate studies would provide alternative choices for her.

I also ran a second pilot study with a practising administrator in a large elementary school. On my first visit to her school she took me on a guided tour, meeting staff and talking about how she ran her school. This administrator wanted to have some specific questions for our discussion before we met. I did send her some specific questions about her working reality and asked that she share some positive and negative vignettes about her school and what she learned from these experiences. When I arrived for the interview the principal seemed rather uptight and proceeded to hand me a copy of two pages of neatly answered questions. I asked that we talk about the answers, so that we could explore more of her experiences. It took her about a half hour to become comfortable with me and with the process. But this level of trust was insufficient. It proved to be difficult for her to share negative experiences. Perhaps she did not want to show any weaknesses or vulnerabilities.

Through writing in my journal about this session I came to the conclusion that if my research study were to be successful it would have to be collaborative: I felt that the administrator in my second pilot study needed to feel a sense of security with other administrative colleagues in a safe and

secure setting to open up and let down her guard. From my own experience as an administrator in a collaborative supportive group, collaborative autobiography would allow the participants to listen and learn from one another and explore their own practices in a safe environment and to learn ways they could improve. The purpose of this study was two-fold; to document how the process of collaborative autobiography can assist principals, first, to come to a better understanding of their own administrative development and second, from the knowledge and insight gained from collaborative autobiography, to develop possible school improvement initiatives for their school community.

Specifically, administrators were given the opportunity to tell their own life histories and to discuss reactions with colleagues. From these histories, themes which reflected the issues faced by these administrators were documented, given to the group for verification, and strategies for possible practices were outlined. At the same time, the project itself is a documentation of a strategy, collaborative autobiography, which can be used by others in the facilitation of personal reflection.

Autobiography as a Research Methodology in Education

Pope and Keen (1981) noted that if one is to adopt a perspective of the personal in educational research, alternative methodologies to quantitative studies are needed.

Kelly (1955) also launched a theory of personal constructs where the person in the research becomes the central focus in constructing his/her reality. Graham (1989) also suggested that autobiography directs both theory and practice. Butt (1988) noted that the participants in the educational process, students, teachers and parents, need to begin to negotiate what is taught and how, so that coupled with continuous evaluation of the learning, the curriculum is decided by those who are directly involved in the learning process. Grumet (1988) believed curriculum is no longer a mask of reality, but encompasses our realities and dreams and becomes the living of our own story. Berk (1980) argued that this autobiographical approach allows us to make sense of individual experience, discover the educational significance of a teacher's experiences and relate them to previous and later experiences (p.93). Therefore, to come to an appreciation of teacher's knowledge with respect to classrooms, we need to understand the contexts of their work. In this research study, autobiographical research is proposed as a means of researching the personal and professional processes of administrative work and the impacts of the insights gained have for school improvement. As a practising administrator who saw the benefits of learning with a supportive collaborative group of colleagues, I wanted other administrative colleagues to also enjoy that experience. The process of collaborative autobiography as developed by Butt

and Raymond (1989, 1990) offered the answer for me as my research methodology.

Design of the Study

In this study the participants were principals who worked together through four phases of a collaborative autobiographical process designed to help principals reflect on previous experiences in their personal and professional lives and choose possible working strategies for school improvement. This process involved a depiction of the context of the principal's current working reality, a description of current pedagogy and curriculum-in-use, reflections on past personal and professional lives that might facilitate understanding present professional thoughts and actions and finally, a projection into preferred futures through a critical appraisal of the previous three phases.

As noted by Butt and Raymond (1990) only after each participant has had an opportunity to share their stories with other members of the group does the group enter into a discussion and interpretation of each principal's autobiographical narrative. In this process, the initial onus for the interpretation of qualitative data lies with the autobiographer. As the researcher, besides facilitating this process, I identified additional themes, potential patterns, issues, events and sequence of events, and brought them back to the participants for verification. I also kept a personal

reflective journal on each session.

Participants

For this study, seven principals were chosen - four women and three men. Nine possible participants were initially identified in consultation with the Superintendent of Student Services; the criteria for selection being a range of administrative experience, an interest in school improvement, an openness to this type of research study, and a positive personal relationship with me. Two of the individuals identified were unable to attend the initial meeting, and chose not to participate in the project. The principals chosen had a wide range of administrative experience from beginning principals, to veterans. The rationale for this wide range of experience was that the collaborative part of this process would be enriched from the diversity of administrative background and experience. All of the principals were from elementary schools, and taught part-time.

The Process

The group met early in November, 1991 to receive information about what was entailed in the collaborative autobiographical process. At the first meeting, I explained that each participant would work through the four phases of the process, involving a depiction of the content of the principal's current working reality, a description of current

pedagogy and curriculum-in-use or workstyle as an administrator, reflection on past personal and professional lives that might facilitate the understanding of present professional thoughts and actions, and finally, a projection into preferred futures through a critical appraisal of the previous three phases. Although the outline of the collaborative autobiographical process was developed for teachers, I advised the participants that could change the content from teacher to administrator. I explained to the principals that the process would require seven sessions of three hours duration each for a total of a minimum of 21 hours commitment from each of them.

Participants were advised at the initial meeting that only after each participant had an opportunity to share their stories with other members of the group would the group enter into the second part of the process - the discussion and interpretation of each principal's autobiographical narrative (Butt and Raymond, 1990). It was explained to the group that in this process the major onus for the interpretation of qualitative data lies with the autobiographer. From the identification of themes, patterns, issues, events and sequence of events, they would develop some insights into how they could enhance their practice. The third stage of the process was my interpretation of the insights into their personal and professional lives and school improvement.

I asked that each participant think over this research

study, and advise me if they wished to be part of this process. One of the principals suggested that they decide right away. They all agreed to be part of the research project, and took out calendars and set the meeting times. It was decided that beginning in January, 1992 the group would meet every second Wednesday from 1 PM until 4 PM until the end of March. See Chart 1, Appendix A for the details of each of the sessions.

I advised them that all their stories would be electronically tape recorded and after each session I would review their stories, identify themes and bring these back to the group for a validity check. I also informed them that stories written in the dissertation would be presented in their own words, with editorial changes made only to help with the flow and clarity of the stories.

Another topic discussed at the initial meeting was the importance of trustworthiness and confidentiality. It was explained to the group that any breaches of confidentiality would result in the cancellation of this research project. For the purpose of anonymity all the names of the participants and places discussed would be changed.

I also explained that they would be involved in two evaluations of this research project - one immediately upon completion of the study, and another six months later to see what effect, if any, this study had on their own practice.

In the writing of the dissrtation, four principal's

stories were used. The reason for the four stories, instead of seven came from the fact that two of the principals did not attend some of the sessions due to health reasons, and a third was going through a personal crisis, and was too vulnerable to have the story written and read in a dissertation at this time.

The Process of Collaborative Autobiography

Working Reality

I began by asking the group to think about a particular day or incident in their work, jotting notes if they wished. The participants were asked to describe specific critical incidents or vignettes as these communicate better than using abstract notions. This helped participants focus on finding and identifying important aspects of working reality and its constraints. The participants were asked to shape these aspects into a coherent portrait or description that would convey to themselves and to the others their working reality. To be effective, this portrait needed to include description and analysis. In describing the working reality the participants were encouraged not to be afraid to identify and surface the negative aspects of their job, as well as the sources of joy as both very important. Participants were reminded that this is one of the few opportunities where they have the opportunity to be constructively negative, to surface issues and to deal with them. Six hours (two sessions) were

allocated to working reality in this research.

Pedagogy

The second theme is pedagogy and curriculum in use. The aim of this theme is to unearth and make explicit what is actually taught by each participant. This is not (necessarily) the official curriculum, but the curriculum and pedagogy the participants and their pupils author and live within the school.

The participants were asked to describe and explain what they were committed to teach, and what they actually taught. They were asked to consider whether these were different contexts resulting in different pedagogies with different classes of kids and different grade levels. Participants were asked to reflect on their teaching style; the preferred strategies or ways of organizing that they might have; their particular routines, implicit or explicit rules, principles, metaphors, or images that helped guide their instruction. As the process progressed participants were asked to consider what appeared to be major facts that influenced their thoughts and actions as teachers, what concerns, paradoxes or dilemmas affected their work, and whether there were patterns or images that guided their thoughts and actions.

If the participants chose they could use a particular vignette to convey lived curriculum and pedagogy. They were

advised that this could be in the form of documenting what they thought about when they planned specific lessons - honestly - as they usually did, or by describing one of their favourite sets of instructional resources which would include how they adapted it and used it, and why they found it appealing. Five hours were taken for this part of the process.

Personal and Professional Past

The next part of the process looks at how they came to be the way they were as teachers - the influence of the past. The participants were told that in the section on "past", there were two broad areas that they could draw from in their understanding of their teaching; first, their personal life history - all the way from childhood (their personal architecture of self, if you will) and second, their professional career and experience in different contexts, classes and subjects.

Under this theme, if there were significant events or changes in the context in their career that changed them as teachers or administrators, they were asked to describe them and to include a before and after snapshot of their teaching. They were encouraged to question what in their past personal or professional life had a significant impact on them as teachers. The participants were also encouraged to share events or episodes that were "educational" for them - moments

of insights, moments that changed them and their outlook and to describe and explain those transformations. They were encouraged to describe and explain their crossroads, critical incidents and the influence of significant persons as well as any positive or negative images that arose from the past that guided their thoughts and actions as a teachers.

For this theme, participants were encouraged to describe how they did change - from before an "event" to after; to identify trends, incidents or experiences which brought coherence, or helped the evolution, development and/or consolidation of thoughts and actions as teachers.

The participants were informed that they could select major incidents from the above and arrange and link the description and explanation so that their account revealed how they came to think and act the way they did as teachers. Seven hours were spent on this part of the process.

The Future

The final part of the reflective process focuses upon the question "What do I want to become as a teacher or administrator?" - the future. Participants were instructed to review the process to this point, taking a critical and visionary stance towards their evolving personal/professional lives.

They were given the following questions as stimulants for thought and discussion:

* What concerns, problems, sources of agitation can you identify that you wish to solve in your working life, your curriculum - in - use, or your pedagogy and how can you solve them?
* What are the alternatives for you and possible change perspectives?
* Is it possible for you to transcend these paradoxes or dilemmas? How?
* What plan of action do you have for change?

The participants were encouraged to identify several "growth trends" in their professional lives:

* What new things did they want to engage to improve their school's curriculum and pedagogy? Why and how?
* What will revitalize or renew their professional lives?
* How can they personalize their professional life - i.e., integrate their personal interests?
* Why might they want this?
* What long term dreams, visions, do they have?
* What alternatives, gradual pathways and/or steps, could they identify that will move their realities towards their dream?

Evaluation of the Process

At the conclusion of the twenty one hours of interviews each principal evaluated the process in writing immediately upon completion. The second part of the evaluation took place six months later and looked at what effect the process had on their administrative practice.

The following were the four questions asked of each principal:

1. How have the sharing sessions helped in your personal and professional life?
2. Have these sessions helped to affirm your administrative practices or foster new insights into your practice?
3. As a group of principals working through this process of sharing your stories and experiences, have we as a group helped to empower each other, and if we have, how has this helped you at the school level?
4. Rogers (1969) noted that experiences that involve the learners' genuine self results in lasting significance. Please feel free to summarize and share the positive and negative aspects of this process.

The final audit of this study took place with the review of my analysis by one of the principals whose story was not told in this paper.

Data Analysis

Following the completion of each session, I analyzed the data from the collaborative discussions, identified themes in each of the principal's stories and brought that analysis back to the group to ensure reliability.

Each participant received transcripts of their working reality, personal and professional past and their future with very little editing done to the transcript. Participants were asked to revise or change their story if they felt that it did not reflect what they intended to say. Only one participant made any changes. For the second part of the process, the stories were reviewed and collaborative themes that were developed. In the third part of the data analysis, I reviewed the transcripts and themes again, and wrote my personal reflections on each story.

Delimitations and Limitations

This study was originally planned for seven administrators, however the actual stories used were reduced to four due to reasons alluded to earlier (see page 72). Also the section on pedagogy did not develop as the administrators expressed their philosophy in their working reality and personal and professional past instead. This led to pedagogy being dropped from the study.

Since the group knew each other and worked in the same organization they were guarded to some extend, for their own

protection, in what was shared with one another.

Outline of Study

The first chapter contains the significance and purpose of this study, and a review of the literature on leadership and autobiography. The second chapter includes the methodology for this research study, and is followed by the four chapters of administrators' stories with collaborative discussions and themes followed by my personal reflections. Chapter Seven is the evaluation of the process by the participants and the final chapter contains further reflection on literature and final recommendations and conclusions.

CHAPTER THREE

NANCY'S STORY

The following principal's story is Nancy's - a pseudonym for the real name of the person. This chapter will outline Nancy's working reality, personal and professional past, and aspirations for the future. The story is followed by a discussion of the themes of the story as developed collaboratively by the group, and by my analysis of the story. This story is told in Nancy's words with changes made only to enhance the understanding and flow of the story. The accuracy of those changes has been verified by both "Nancy" and one additional principal whose story was not presented here but who has audited these stories to ensure their validity. This story is the only one told by Nancy.

Nancy is a school principal with about ten years of experience, most spent in "high needs schools". The following story is told in Nancy's own words. She had this story prepared in written form, and read it to the group.

Working Reality

For my first vignette, I will review a real life experience that was a true learning experience for me. A Grade 6 girl by the name of Jane, approximately age 13 became a more frequent visitor to my office due to drastic changes in

behaviour. I recalled Jane as being a somewhat rebellious girl but with a likeable sense of humour and an innocence and naivete about her. During the first four months of the year, Jane's grades were in the A area. After Christmas however, Jane developed an "I don't care" attitude towards every aspect of school. Her marks dropped drastically, she constantly talked back to the teacher and school attendance became a problem.

Her classroom teacher called Jane's mother, a single parent, in order to understand the home situation. Instead of expressing concern and offering co-operation, the mother was defensive, often blaming the school and the teacher for the problems with Jane. I believed that the Guidance Counsellor should become involved as well as the system Social Worker because of the problem, and made the appropriate referrals.

Due to his heavy caseload the guidance counsellor could only meet with Jane on two occasions and the conclusion arrived at was that she was going through a difficult stage. He then handed the case over to the social worker regarding the attendance problem.

The social worker became involved and often had to go to Jane's house and get her out of bed and bring her to school. In spite of my requests, no formal counselling support was initiated by either the social worker or the guidance consultant. By late February I asked for a meeting with the parent, the social worker and myself, as I was becoming

increasingly concerned with Jane's continuing deterioration, and had begun to suspect the possibility of drug involvement.

The mother arrived at the meeting with the smell of alcohol on her breath. She was accompanied by her boyfriend, Bob. She became very angry with the social worker after only a few questions were asked, got up and walked out of the room leaving the boyfriend behind. He then left to go and try to calm her down. After about five minutes, he returned to the meeting, leaving her in the car, and explained to us that Jane had run away and was staying in a drug house in the community with her sister. He stated that both he and Mary had tried to get her out of the house, but were unable to do so. He admitted to the social worker and me that both girls had become physically abusive to their mother and that Mary didn't know what to do. The social worker suggested that contact be made with the police in order to obtain assistance in getting Jane out of the drug house, and back at home. Because Bob was so confused and upset at this time, I called the police and reported the incident. They took the address and they said that they would get her out.

That evening many thoughts crossed my mind. The family appeared to be totally dysfunctional, and the social worker was talking long term counselling when what was needed was immediate intervention into the drug problem. I felt that the mother was too weak to assist her daughters and required help now. I was concerned that Jane was spending the nights away

from home and not coming to school, the logical progression of such behaviour would be living on the streets. That meant that Jane would end up stealing or selling her body to stay alive and at the age of 13 that was a very grim future for her. Whether I was successful in my attempts to get her help was not of utmost importance to me - the message that I wanted to give her and her family was that she was special and worth fighting to save. My hope was that maybe she would remember that someone did genuinely care for her as a person. I also knew that the direction that I would be taking would not be supported by my superiors so I decided to go it on my own and take the consequences for it.

In talking to my husband, who is a social worker, one of the few available contacts for a crisis situation of this nature was a volunteer parent group called PRIDE. He recommended that I call them the next day.

The next morning I made the call to PRIDE and informed them of the situation. I explained to them that I was new at this sort of thing, and they said that they would take me through it, one step at a time. The first step, they said was to convince Jane and her mother that they needed help. Once that was done the next step would be to take Jane to a Doctor James, who worked with the agency, and who would do a medical and psychological assessment related to the possible drug problem. I felt confident that I could convince the mother - Jane, I was not as sure about.

I met with the teacher and told her that I wanted to see Jane as soon as she came to school. I explained to the teacher that some action was going to be taken and I would give details at a later time.

Jane arrived at my office at 9:30 that morning. She was so thin and pale and seemed rather agitated. I invited her to come in and sit down. I expressed concern for her and told her that I knew that she was involved with a drug house in the community. I asked her about using drugs and when she had become heavily involved in them. She would not give me any information as it may hurt her relationship with her friends. I explained to her that her life was out of control and that she needed help. She told me it was none of my business and to stay out of it. I told her that I cared about her and her life was moving in the direction of living on the street and that stealing and prostitution may become a way of life for her. For some reason, I hit a nerve, which told me that she was really afraid of the possibility of prostitution. I asked if she would trust me and go for help she said yes and hugged me. The hug was like a little frightened child trying to draw the strength to go on.

After Jane left my office and went to get her things in the classroom, I called Mary, Jane's mother. I talked to Mary about Jane and the drug problem and Mary expressed shock and surprise that Jane may have a drug problem. I explained to her that I had called PRIDE and needed her support to get some

help for Jane. She agreed and told me that she loved her daughter. I said that I would pick her up in 15-20 minutes and that our first step would be to take Jane to a doctor who works closely with PRIDE on drug addiction. She agreed and said that she would support what I intended to do. Before leaving the school I made two calls - one to the doctor's office to say that I was coming and the other to my Zone Superintendent to let him know what I was doing. He was in a meeting and could not be disturbed.

Jane and I left the school around 10:20 to pick up Mary. As I now recall that drive Jane appeared almost relieved that the secret was in the open and action was going to be taken. I explained to her that we were going to the doctor's office and he would talk to her and do blood and urine tests. I also explained to her that we may send her for drug treatment. I confided in her that I didn't have all the answers for her as this was all new for me and we would all have to take this one step at a time.

When we arrived at the apartment Mary immediately came out. She appeared angry or upset when she got into the car. As I looked at her, a lady of 37 years, she looked hard and more like a woman in her fifties. Life had obviously been hard for her and I felt that she needed kindness and compassion - not a lecture on how to be a good mother. As we drove to the doctor's office, Jane talked to her mother about where she was born and when they first moved to the city. She

also talked about her little nephew and how much he liked her. Somehow there seemed to be comfort for them in talking about a simpler, happier time.

As we arrived at the doctor's office, I asked Jane if she was afraid and she said that she was. I explained that it was important to be honest with the doctor and we would be just outside and were supportive of her. On the elevator Jane talked again about her little nephew and how much she cared for him and how he always would look for her when she came to visit. Mom was very non-responsive and seemed absorbed in her own thoughts and problems.

At the doctor's office the nurse knew the case and said that the doctor would see Jane shortly. Directly beside the nurse's desk was a sign for Cocaine Anonymous and that brought the reality of the visit home to each of us. Jane said that if the doctor was mean she wasn't going to stay. I explained to her that the doctor had worked with many teens and that he would not be judgemental of her. When the doctor entered the room he appeared to be a gentle, quiet man. This appearance appeared to calm her down, and when he asked to see her, she went into his office willingly.

Mary began to talk to me about the violence and mood swings at home with Jane and her sister who also was involved in drugs. Mary had been kicked in the stomach and been hit on the head by Jane just last night. She told me that Jane had always tried to please her mother and although there were many

fights and arguments with her other two daughters, Jane had always been the good, kind daughter who wanted to please. Her heart was broken to see this daughter show such hatred toward her. I explained that it was the drugs talking and not Jane. Mary told me that she came from an abusive alcoholic family. She said that her marriage broke up after Jane was born and she was on her own to support the three girls. She worked as a waitress in a late night bar so she could not supervise the girls and did not have the education to get a day job. The current boyfriend seemed kind to her and the girls but he was also reaching the end of his rope. Mary said that if Jane was involved in drugs that she would do what it took to help her.

The doctor called us both into his office after examining and talking to Jane. He was unable to obtain a urine test from Jane, however, based on the psychological assessment he felt that she was a high risk. He continued by saying that because she was only thirteen years old and high risk, he believed that she should go to a treatment centre. He told Mary that treatment had to be an ongoing process and that he and PRIDE worked with parents and kids who have been involved in these treatment programs. He asked Jane how she felt about going to a treatment centre in Utah or Arizona. She told him that she did not want to go. Dr. James told her at thirteen, adults had to make the best decisions for her. Then Dr. James asked Mary how she felt about it - Mary said that she did not have a choice as it was her daughter's life that we were

talking about. The Doctor explained to Mary that she would have to take Jane to the treatment centre, leave her there and then return to be part of the counselling sessions with her for a week. The doctor reassured Mary that it was an excellent program, Jane meanwhile was not very happy with the situation. Dr. James then called PRIDE and said that we would be over to see them.

I suggested to Mary and Jane that we go for lunch before we go to PRIDE. We all needed a break in the tension and stress and talk about what the doctor said to us.

On the drive to lunch Jane became very quiet. During the drive Mary apologized for her behaviour in my office the day before. She said that the social worker seemed so high and mighty and did an excellent job of making her feel stupid and unfit as a mother. I made efforts to include Jane but she continued to be very withdrawn. I wondered if she hadn't had drugs earlier in the morning and they were wearing off. I also began to fear that she may run from us and I only hoped that we would make it to PRIDE.

We stopped at the Dairy Queen and Mary bought lunch. As we sat there Mary expressed concern about missing work as she had to be there by 3 P.M. Her job paid the rent and she could not afford to lose it. Mary said that she would call her boss from PRIDE as she hadn't slept all day and was in no shape to go to work that night. Jane, meanwhile, went alone to the washroom. I wondered if she had drugs on her or if she would

run on us. We took the chance, however, and she came back to us. Somehow she had the message that we cared about her and we were trying to help her.

Upon leaving the Dairy Queen, for the PRIDE office, Jane again became withdrawn and angry. It almost seemed that the adventure was changing from fun to a more probing and difficult scene. When we got out of the car, I talked to her and put my arm around her. I assured her that we were all in this together. It seemed to calm her fears. Mary tried to be supportive as well but was obviously afraid of what we were about to face.

As we went into the office, I introduced myself and asked for Colleen, the lady I had spoken to earlier. When she came, I introduced myself, Jane and Mary to her. Colleen told us the first step was to view a video on drug education. Jane became angry with Mary and me for taking her to PRIDE, and said that she was not going to watch or listen to this "garbage". Colleen used her skills in defusing the situation by saying to Jane that Mary and I truly cared for her and she was very lucky to have us and she needed our support. The video identified a lot of the behaviours that Jane had been exhibiting both at school and at home. After the video was over we discussed it and Jane's use of drugs. Jane got up and told us she was not leaving her friends and not going for help. She became verbally abusive to Mary and me and started crying. Mary went to her and tried to comfort her. Colleen

told Jane that she really didn't have a choice. Colleen then asked to speak to Mary and me alone. We left Jane in the room for a few minutes.

Colleen told Mary that she felt from the doctor's report and her own observations, that drug treatment was needed. Mary admitted to Colleen that Jane was totally out of control at home and I said the same regarding school. Colleen spoke seriously to Mary about being committed to counselling for the entire family. She said that sending Jane for drug treatment was only the first stop in a long process. Mary agreed that she would become involved in counselling as part of a long term program.

We went back into the room with Jane and told her that she would be going to a drug treatment centre in Arizona. We had a brochure on it and began to show it to her. Jane said that she was not going and the treatment centre looked like a prison. Mary then looked at Jane and said that they were going to Arizona that was her final decision. I felt proud of Mary that at last she had taken control even if it meant that she might have to look at her own addiction problem. Colleen came back and all the necessary arrangements had been made. Mary had to pay for their airfare at a reduced rate but Alberta Health would look after Jane's treatment in Arizona. Colleen spoke again to Mary and Jane about the need for commitment stressing that treatment was just the beginning of a long journey of life without drugs.

We left PRIDE and headed home. During the drive Jane said that she could not go and leave her friends. Mary told her that she really didn't have a choice from what the doctor and the people at PRIDE had said. Jane became more accepting of going for treatment but I suspected there would be a wide range of emotions hot and cold over the rest of the day. Jane wanted to get some things at school and say goodbye, Mary said no and from the look that she gave me it was clear that she feared Jane would run. I said that I would say goodbye for her - Jane then told me that she would be labelled a druggy and all the kids and teachers would know why she had left. I told her that I would try and deal with the situation with confidentiality and sensitivity.

When we arrived at the apartment Mary thanked me for all that I had done and promised to call me. When I got out of the car, Jane came over and hugged me, again trying to drain the strength from me to go and face what had to be done. Mary also came and hugged me and seemed also to need the strength and courage to go on.

I wish this story had a happy ending. Jane was in treatment for over six months as she was heavily involved with cocaine. Mary, however, did not go for the counselling sessions offered by PRIDE. She called me in September looking for a Junior High for Jane and she told me in a hard, cold voice that Jane was responsible for her own actions. I felt that conflict had once again began at home. During the course

of that year, I heard that Jane and another girl were expelled from school due to stealing. Due to lack of commitment for long term counselling involvement with the PRIDE support group, I believe that Jane is using drugs again and possibly living on the streets.

After a year I still have strong feelings about the whole situation, though I do not hold any negative feelings about what was done. I feel that Jane will know in her heart that someone believed that she was special and someone truly cared for her. I hope that maybe some day, the memory of someone's caring may bring her back.

For me, I felt the necessity to question the lack of support that I had. A meeting was called with the Supervisor of Guidance, the School guidance consultant and myself. I pleaded for some drug education to be put in the schools so that another principal wouldn't be faced with what I had to face. The supervisor said that he would try to initiate some action but as of this date nothing in drug education has been put in place.

In analyzing the entire situation, I realized that it was a wonderful growing experience for me. I had expressed openly with Mary and Jane our fears and anxieties in an honest way and which also helped me deal with my own fears. Maybe they could feel that I was genuine in my concern and that sensitivity came from my background.

There have been several other events which have occurred

during my tenure as principal of a high needs school which outline the isolation and stress that an educator might feel in this type of environment.

Often, one sees signs of trouble, but is unable to put together a strong enough case to convince those who can help. Here is one example of such an incident.

John

The Special Education teacher reported to me a serious problem with a seven year old boy in her class. During recess times, John had urinated on the playground in front of other boys and girls, often brought matches to school and was beginning to light them at recess. The latest, and most serious event was that John was putting his hands up girls' sweaters and skirts during class and at recess. Since he was a big, strong boy for his age the little girls in the Special Education class were terrified of him.

When this was brought to my attention, I asked to speak to John. In talking to him about his behaviour I attempted to discover if anyone had touched him in the private areas. He disclosed to me that men whom he referred to as his uncles had done this in the past.

Based upon that information I called the Sexual Assault team from Social Services to come out and talk to John. It took them several days to respond, and apparently, before coming, they had made contact with John's grandmother, and

informed her of the investigation, and the fact that they would be questioning John.

Social Services investigated and was unable to substantiate the suspicions, although questions did remain unanswered.

Needless to say, by the time the team arrived at the school to talk to John, he completely closed up.

John was moved from our school to another Special Education program with more boys. The teacher and I were viewed by Student Services as having over-reacted to the situation, as he appeared to be fine in the new class. Within four months, however, all of the old behaviours started to recur but they were ignored as no one had the time (or the will) to become involved.

I have lost track of John, and don't know what is happening with him at this time. I remain concerned, however, as all of the signs of sexual abuse were definitely there. John needed help and was unable to receive it.

Don

Just as I was leaving school on a Friday evening in early fall, there was gentle tap on my window. There was a little boy, Don, who was new to school, asking for my help. He asked if he could come into the school to get his glasses from his classroom as his mother was cross that he left them behind. I tried to remember his mother, but was unable to picture her

in my mind. Don seemed desperate, so I let him in and told him to go to the classroom, and I would wait for him.

He returned in a few minutes and we walked out together. He seemed relieved about getting his glasses. I told him to have a good weekend and he said goodbye and thanks. He got on his bike and headed for home.

On Monday morning I received a call from one of our parents to say his mom took her own life and also the life of Don. I was shocked and bewildered by this news. Apparently, his mom had a record of depression and Don was in several foster homes over the years, but none of that information was given to the school. I asked how they died for I hoped that it was not painful for Don. Apparently, she drove around the city for a long time on Friday evening. She headed home and they died in the garage of carbon monoxide fumes. The results of the police investigation was murder-suicide.

Later in the day, Don's teacher read his journal that talked of feeling like a caged animal. He was very afraid his mother was going to hurt him. If only we had known.....

Don has remained in my thoughts and prayers over the past six years. Sometimes I wonder if we could have done more but realize that maybe the loving patience shown to him on that Friday afternoon and the warm smile and touch on the shoulder was all I could give him.

Conclusion

My several years as an administrator in inner city schools have taught me wonderful lessons in service to others. Over that time, I have had the joy of seeing a school become a warm, safe haven for abused children. I have seen staff love and hug these children and make them feel special. I have watched anger and violence on the playground change to cooperation and sharing. We became a family - children, staff and parents. We had our conflicts and disappointments but we supported and accepted and loved one another in spite of them. It makes me feel proud to have played a small role in creating that feeling.

Personal and Professional Past

I was the youngest of five children, born in a coal mining town in the Eastern part of the country. My father was a boiler worker in the mines and my mother was a housewife. As the youngest in a family of five, there was a wide gap in ages with my other siblings. I had three sisters and one brother with the sibling closest to me being seven years older. It always seemed my sisters were also my mother as being older they always knew what was best for me. At times this created problems. Because of my independent nature I often would not listen to them and instead, would do things my own way.

A significant person in my childhood was my grandmother.

When I was born, my family moved to live with my her. It was a situation of need for a bigger home, coupled with the fact that my grandmother needed help with the house and the land.

My father did not get along with my grandmother, as my mother's family was of a higher class than my working class father's family. Needless to say my grandmother never let him forget his lower status.

My grandmother was a tiny, determined lady who had come with her husband to Canada from Ireland. They came with only the clothes on their backs. Grandfather was a very bright, hard working man who became a builder. He bought the land on the road where we lived and, with his brother, built houses. He also worked in the mines and ran a farm for the family. Grandfather died in his early forties as a result of a cave-in while he was working in the mines. Grandmother tried her best to keep the family and property together, but had little help from the boys in the family. They did not have the same determination as their father, and were a disappointment to her.

My father was a disappointment to my grandmother as well. He lacked drive and determination and in addition, had a drinking problem. Although he was a very hard worker and may have drank in part due to the frustration of being unable to provide for his family, my grandmother despised him. She never understood why my mother married such a "backward" man. Because of my father's drinking and the hostile feeling my

grandmother had toward him, the family was often divided and in conflict.

Grandmother took a special liking to me when we moved in with her and always protected me from my siblings. Some special memories come to mind of her talking to me in Gaelic and telling me stories of the spirits and the reading of tea-leaves when people came to visit. She was also very devoted to her faith and made sure each of us had that same devotion. I recall her walking over five miles in all kinds of weather to attend Sunday Mass. She would stay for all three masses before walking home again. Grandmother had a tough exterior but was a kind, loving person inside and always made me feel very special.

When my grandmother was dying, different members of the family would sit with her. Although she had terminal cancer, she refused to go to the hospital. It was the home my grandfather had built and she intended to die there, and nowhere else. When the pain was bad my sisters who were training as nurses would give her morphine injections. Rarely would my grandmother cry out in pain, and we had to watch for signs that she needed another injection. Often she would call for me to sit with her and hold her hand. On her last day I was the one sitting with her as she breathed her last breath and quietly passed on. Grandmother died the way she lived in a very, peaceful dignified manner. This taught me, at the early age of seven a lesson in courage. Although upset, I

seemed to understand that grandmother was free from all her pain, and safe with grandfather.

After my grandmother died, my mother fell apart completely. I remember her crying all night and feeling that she could not accept grandmother's death. The situation grew worse for my mother and eventually she left me with my sisters and father and went to another city to live with her brother and sister. As a small child I not only lost the grandmother I deeply loved but I also lost my mother.

Her leaving left a very deep gap of trust in our relationship which was never reconciled. I felt betrayed by her and wondered why she never took me with her. Now, having an understanding about alcoholism and its effects on people, and recognizing that grandmother was probably the only source of strength and support for my mother, I can see how she might have felt trapped. Being unable to cope with my father's drinking any longer, she decided to flee the scene.

As a child I had a wonderful fascination with nature. My father and I would explore the woods outside our house. He would point out the birds and their nests and we would often pick berries together. There were ponds in the woods where we would collect polliwogs in the spring and watch them hatch. In the winter we would skate on the same pond.

The ocean with its changing moods was also a very special place for me. In summer it was a wonderful playground where I would build sand castles and run through the waves. It was

a place for me to go if I had troubles for the ocean seemed to soothe them and helped me to make sense out of things. Nature was a source of healing for me and even to this day a trip to the mountains or a walk in the country brings me a sense of peace.

Another significant event in my childhood was my determination to read. At the age of five I wanted to be able to read like my brother and sisters. I asked to be taken to the library, but kept getting told that there was plenty of time for me to learn to read. That answer was one that I didn't want to hear and would not accept. I decided that I was going to do something about it.

An older girl who lived a few doors down from me, went once a week by bus to the library as the library was five miles away. Although I did not have the bus fare, I decided to take a chance and go with the older girl, hoping the bus driver wouldn't put me off the bus. I sheepishly got on the bus with her and got off without the bus driver saying a word. With some relief, I went into the library and what a special place it was. I still remember the wonderful smell of books and had the feeling that this was a very special place and a safe haven.

I approached the librarian and said that I would like to take out some books. She asked how old I was, I told her five and she asked me if I knew how to read. I said that I was just learning. She questioned why a parent did not come with

me and I had no answer for her. Maybe out of sympathy she gave in and issued me a temporary library card. She told me I could take out two books. What a feeling of joy to at last have the chance to read. On leaving the library came the question of how to get home. The options included walking the five miles which would make me late for supper or taking another chance on the bus. Being a risk taker, I decided that I would again hope for the generosity of the bus driver to get me home.

I quietly got on the bus with my friend and we went to our seats. This time the bus driver took a different route home, the longer route, so my friend got off the bus first. Now I figured I was really in for it. On my way off the bus, the bus driver was annoyed with me and said that he would get the fare from my father who regularly rode the bus to the mines. I sheepishly said that I was sorry but I wanted to go to the library to learn to read.

When I got home, my mother was cross with me but for some reason I don't recall getting punished for my adventure. My father never did mention the incident to me so I was never sure if the bus driver did report me.

An important person in my childhood was my first grade teacher. She was a very neat, meticulous person with a warm, gentle smile. She could create a special spell in the classroom when she would either read or tell a story. She reminded me of how my grandmother could create that special

aura when she would talk to me in Gaelic or talk about the mystery of the spirits. It always amazed me how such an ordinary looking lady had such magic in her. Our little workbooks were special books to work in because she made us feel that they were so special. I didn't want to go out for recess because I just loved being in that special place with her and my classmates. When we made a mistake she would not get angry with us but would just gently remind us she wanted better work from us.

For the next seven years of schooling I really was a very average student, still loving to read but never really being motivated or should I say no one ever made me feel I had any special talent. Then came my Grade 8 Teacher, Mr. Warner. He had taught both my sister and brother but they did not like him. From my first day in his class, although he was a disciplinarian, he made me feel I could do things that I didn't think I could do. When I made a mistake, he would gently talk to me about how to improve. During that year my average went from C's to straight A's. At the end of the year he compared my marks with the year before, and looking at me said, "Now you know what you are capable of and don't ever produce less than that again." His words have remained with me and I have remained a very good student for the rest of my school career. He was a teacher who made learning easy and created a safe environment to take a risk as did my Grade 1 teacher. They both made learning a special adventure as they

thought of the feelings and needs of the students before the curriculum.

For my first teaching assignment I was sent to a very traditional school. Some of the teachers boasted about having had the same plan book for the past five years. The students' desks in my classroom were not arranged in rows and the classroom was a very activity centred place, which meant that there was usually a lot of noise coming from my room.

About the third week of September, the principal asked if he could come and visit my class. I eagerly welcomed him as the students and I were enjoying our learning. After dismissal, he came back to see me. He questioned why the desks were not arranged in rows and commented that my printing certainly was not as neat as the other teachers. He said that I should improve. As well, I needed to work on discipline so that the students would remain quiet and orderly. To say the least I was devastated. With my husband delayed at our old residence due to moving problems and being alone in a new city I had absolutely no one to turn to in this dilemma.

That night I decided that I must take some action. There was a gentle lady in the school who was the counsellor and with whom I got along fairly well. The next morning, I talked to her about what had happened to me and she offered some advice. She told me to talk to the principal and question his hard method of supervision of a beginning teacher and to explain to him that although he had the experience I lacked,

I did have the same degrees and training that he had. She stressed that his status should not frighten me. She also knew the principal and said he was a good Christian man who at times overreacted to situations.

I followed her advice and asked to meet with the principal over recess. He suggested we go for a little walk around the school. I unburied my frustration to him tears and all, and as my friend had said, he listened. This tall Italian man was devastated at the hurt he had caused. He defended himself by saying that he used that strategy with beginning teachers in order to get them on the right path and let them know he would not put up with nonsense. He said that he was sorry that he had lacked understanding of my situation and we were able to end the meeting with respect for each other. Over the years, that principal and I have become friends and have to this day a special respect and understanding for each other.

During my time at that school, I worked closely with an innovative French teacher and under her guidance developed a French program in the Grade I classroom. I also created a Fine Arts room with the help of Junior High students, forming an environment where students could do fine arts in a special room. Teaching Grade 1 taught me a special understanding of young children and I learned that the first agenda of a teacher should be to understand children's individuality and make school a happy learning environment.

After buying a home in a different area of the city, I requested, and was granted a transfer to a school closer to home. There I was assigned a Grade 3 class to teach. This school was an open area facility and had a very difficult school climate. The principal had personal problems and staff undermined not only the administration and each other but were cruel and hurtful towards the students. I remember teachers swearing at each other in the staff room and slamming doors in each others' faces. During my first two years at that school, I remember feeling like an outcast because I would not become part of the undermining group. During that time I often thought of leaving the profession.

At the beginning of my third year at that school, a new principal was assigned to the school and several teachers were transferred. The new administration made efforts to bring harmony and healing to the school. In spite of the improvements in the climate, I felt that I needed a change and asked for a transfer. I did enjoy the students and parents as they were most appreciative of the special things I tried to accomplish. Teachers in this open area school did not work in a collaborative or cooperative manner. They used portable chalk boards and bookcases to create walls so the school was open in name only. That experience of poor climate and culture taught me some excellent lessons that I would use to help develop my own administrative style later.

My next teaching assignment was as a Grade 1 teacher in

a warm, cooperative learning environment where teachers supported and cared for each other. I felt a special warmth among the group from my first day at that school. The emphasis in the school was to work together to assist the students and make the school a special place to grow both for students and teachers. During my three years in that school the "teacher" in me truly developed. I watched and listened to what gifted teachers were doing in their classes and felt a sense of freedom to experiment and try new approaches which would make learning more exciting.

During my years at this school, teachers shared new ideas to improve the curriculum and new innovative programs in Language Arts and Math were developed throughout the school. We were a family and no problem was too difficult to solve. The administration allowed teachers freedom and although the principal had a conservative bent we seemed always to be able to work around it. At times we did have our conflicts, but we worked through them. Upon leaving this school to move into administration myself, I felt that I knew what a school should be like.

Administrative Experience

For my first principalship I was assigned to a small school with declining enrolment and with a staff composed mostly of beginning teachers. Although the school was very traditional and the community did not like too many changes it

needed some new vitality.

During the first year, the staff and I gave the school the boost in vitality that it needed. Although some members of the parent council would occasionally challenge me, we were able to work together and resolve our differences.

In the second year, because of budget restraints and a declining enrolment the school faced closure. Together with the Zone Superintendent a closure procedure was worked out by meeting with parents. We worked through a process of understanding that closure was the best solution to the problem of declining enrolment. Parents agreed and the school was closed the following September. Staff were placed in other schools, but a principal did not have a wide variety of choices for placement. The choices were a bilingual school, (although I did not have background in French), a vice principal position or back in the classroom. Needless to say, I felt that these choices were unacceptable and that this procedure was also very discriminating since a male supervisor was given an Elementary/Junior High principalship without having had any school administrative background. I met with Central Administration and was told I was too ambitious.

Temporary Placement

After meeting with the Superintendent and listening to explanations I left feeling once again that women sat in the back seat. I was however placed as principal of a temporary

school facility with the possibility of being considered for the new school to be built on the site.

Being principal of a temporary facility with 140 students, with no caretaker and no gym required some creative problem solving. Staff and I worked together to provide students with a good academic program where they would also be able to enjoy the learning. It was a difficult situation at first for me, but I felt that I would once again turn the oppression into a positive growing experience.

New School

When the new school came up for bid, I applied and was given the new school to administer. Over the next four years that school grew in size to a population of 380 students. The culture in that school was very family oriented for staff, students and community. The school developed into a safe haven for abused children as teachers nurtured within their classes a protective and caring environment. As a staff we worked on many projects ranging from program development and teacher supervision to teacher and student peer support groups and set new goals each year to further enhance the school. Those five years were difficult ones for me as I spent much time dealing with many social problems. Dealing with those problems forced me to look within myself and begin to deal with my past and the baggage that I had been carrying around with me.

For my next administrative assignment, I took that learning experience and went to a very closed community where a seasoned staff had made little effort to upgrade themselves in new curriculum changes which had been occurring over several years. The teachers in the school had a bad relationship with the former principal and did not have trust in administration. Teachers resisted his efforts of change and were most unwilling to move toward a whole language approach to reading and writing and were not accustomed or willing to work together.

To remove these personal barriers against progressive thinking required time, understanding and patience. With the support of consultants and the Zone Superintendent who provided substitute teachers over a two year period, we began to move toward whole language implementation in the classes. Teachers at the same grade levels and also at different grade levels began a sharing network regarding ideas and monthly plans, as well as writing and reading process ideas. Over that two year period, with the help of my experience from the other school, I was able to overcome many difficult obstacles in bringing the school to a more cooperative, collegial setting. In leaving this school to go on sabbatical, the separation was more of a normal passage than that from my former school which I had opened. That lesson taught me how change is a necessary and integral part of personal and professional growth.

The Future

As I examine my future some common threads from the past weave through the fabric of my life. Both my father and grandmother helped to develop in me a sense of understanding for the needs of others and a feeling that we are all brothers and sisters in one family.

That theme has been carried into my teaching, my administration and what I hope to do in the future. In education I always feel that the needs of the students have to be addressed before the curriculum. As a teacher, I have always felt privileged to be with students and to have an opportunity to in some way touch their lives in a positive way. That was brought into clear focus over the past few years. During that time I lost the concept of self by putting myself into the student and parent position and thus we became one in the same family. I felt their desperation and hopelessness and we worked together to try to improve and understand the situation. This experience of helping others also resulted in my dealing with some baggage I had been carrying around with me for years.

For the future, I hope to do some work in education on the substance abuse theme as either an administrator or on a volunteer basis. I trust some of my independence will help me cope with any adversities that may come my way. It is also my hope that I can develop a relationship with some supportive colleagues and that we can spend time learning and sharing

together. I also hope to regain some of the adventuresome risk taking spirit that I had at age 5, for I do believe I have become too comfortable over the past five years. Another lesson I take into the future is to accept my failures as part of a learning process and not lose my sense of self esteem because of a failure. I am getting better in that area but need continued work on it.

During childhood the theme of separation was a very powerful one for me. Losing, at such an early age the two people I most loved and trusted touched me very deeply.

Coming from a difficult background has affected many of my interactions with others, causing me to be somewhat leery of trusting others and thus at times isolating myself from others. I also tend to be insecure about my own ability to do as well as I think I should or that others think I should. These feelings stem from being from a poor family and being not expected because of this background to advance above my class.

In order to deal with all of this, I have developed a trusting administrative support group which has helped me overcome some of these anxieties. At present, I try to seek out people whom I perceive to be genuine, trustworthy people to associate with, while I continue to resist involvement with people who do not demonstrate a sensitivity for others. I have learned to become more tolerant of those who speak without a deep understanding and sensitivity for people and

try to accept them from where they are coming and I hope to continue to do so in the future.

For the future, there is a need for me to use my knowledge to help others. I hope that I can be supportive as a mentor to others as I probably understand the fears and anxieties that other women in administration have. Moving into administration at an early age and being a woman, I was not taken seriously. That led to feelings of anger which often were expressed in an emotional manner. Having been mentored by an experienced administrator, I learned to use my intelligence and presented gender issues on the basis of gathering facts rather than emotional outbursts. I believe it is because of my genuine concern for others that these issues have been listened to and senior administration has responded to them in the manner that they have.

For the future, I will continue to be a voice for the fair treatment of minorities such as women and will use my intelligence to precipitate changes. For my future professional life, I am unsure if I want to look at the superintendency level in administration or look for an area such as at the university level which will allow me a wider degree of freedom.

A personal future goal that I would like to share is a desire to do some professional writing in educational journals. I feel that I have some experiences that are worthy to be shared with others. I would also like to write a short

story or a small novel on some of my background drawing especially from my grandmother's background. It would be my way of thanking her for the special influence she had in my life.

Also on the personal level is my desire to get back to nature and become physically fit. I used to hike and I want to create the balance in myself of body and spirit and nature helped to bring that harmony to me. I also hope to get back into swimming as I really enjoy the water and it also gives me a feeling of relaxation.

The future for me is compared to the little child who liked going to the beach and playing in the ocean. At first I would swim out to the waves and crash into them and be taken into the undertow of the waves. Then I would realize to really enjoy swimming in the ocean I would have to swim parallel to the waves. Once the force of the wave reached me, I could swim with the wave and rise above the wave and allow it to carry me. Then after the wave had passed, I could swim strongly to stay afloat. The future to me is similar to that swimming experience, having the knowledge and wisdom I can rise above the situation but also realizing that I have to be constantly working and improving my understanding of self and others.

Collaborative Discussion

Nancy had many rich and challenging experiences over her

career as principal and the group enjoyed discussing her stories. They thought that from a very early age Nancy was a risk taker as evidenced by her determination to learn to read and the risk she took to go to the library hoping she wouldn't get into trouble. As an administrator Nancy also took risks when she helped the drug addicted girl and dealt with the death of a pupil on her own. When she took these risks she felt that she had no support from her superiors and had to stand alone with her decisions. Each of these decisions were made in the best interests of the child, not the best interests of Nancy or her career. The administrators in the group all felt very much on their own when they faced problems and difficult situations: they thought that their superiors feared losing jobs or opportunities for advancement, and thus were often not supportive in these types of situations. They discussed together how the result of this risk allowed Nancy to look within herself and grow deeper and stronger in her values as a person and as an administrator just as it had for them in their own situations.

Nancy exemplifies the qualities of being a survivor. Coming from a broken home with an alcoholic father, she thought that the chances of her becoming well educated and a success in a profession seemed impossible, but she also thought that what she could do, others could achieve also. Her assignments as a school principal were challenging but she was able to bring uncooperative staffs together, developing

instead a community of learners.

Nancy is very concerned about the quality of life for others - especially where they have been hurt themselves or could hurt others. She looks for signs of non-acceptance, of being on the outside or of cries for help and feels that she must respond. She can handle these resolutions but can not reconcile them where she didn't get help, such as with Jane or the special education child, or whose cry she didn't hear, such as Don's.

Nancy was able to develop a strong family community in the school she opened where she spent five years as a principal. In her own personal life Nancy had a strong family structure with her husband and her child. When she became a parent, the problems of others did not take such a high priority for Nancy; her own family became the central focus of her life. As a result the group agrees that Nancy had a better balance between her job as an administrator and her own personal life.

Through the process of collaborative autobiography, Nancy realized the richness of her administrative experiences and also the resiliency of her character to overcome problems and become a positive, affirming person to others. Nancy had shared the anger of feeling abandoned by her mother, but also discussed how, through her own spiritual development and faith she had found a sense of peace and resolved some of that conflict and came to terms with it.

From the process Nancy realized that she had the respect and caring of her administrative colleagues in her collaborative autobiographical group and that her experiences were appreciated by them. She found out that the difficult decisions and hurts felt by one administrator in a school system were also felt by others and that together as a group they could support and help heal their hurts together. As for the future, Nancy realized the lack of support from her superiors and viewed her job and the risks she had to take as an administrator with a new perspective.

Themes Identified by the Group

Some questions that come from Nancy's life include: Had the challenging years in a high needs school helped Nancy become a better administrator and person? Would it be a recommendation that administrators, as part of their career, spend time in high needs schools? Did the administrative experiences that Nancy had help her to find a balance in her life between work and her personal life? From this collaborative autobiographical process did Nancy come to a better understanding of self and find the direction she wanted to follow both in her professional and personal life?

The four themes identified by the group were:

Courage/Risk Taker

The group felt that Nancy took risks and tried the limits

of difficult situations without fear. This was evident at an early age in her learning to read at age 5 and her willingness to grow and improve. She also showed courage in making the decision to remove the handicapped child when no one else would and also in the case of the drug dependent pre-teen to take her to the doctor and get her in a treatment program. The group felt that she had the courage to face many difficult obstacles in her life.

Alone

The group was disappointed that as a fellow administrator Nancy had to face these problems alone with very little support from her peers. The concern was that she did not feel comfortable sharing her problems with others, as there was a lack of trust. The group felt that Nancy had deep Christian beliefs as she fought an organization that did not appear to listen to the needs and concerns of the school where she served. Some of the principals in the group were distressed that an organization only recognized and realized a person's value and beliefs when that person was pushed to the wall and had to take action on their own. One principal expressed sadness that Nancy appeared to have far more Christianity and sensitivity in these difficult situations than any of her superiors, who were supposed to be leaders. Another principal noted that Nancy had a clear conscious on both what she did, and on the actions she had taken but the question was raised

whether the same could be said for others in this situation.

Caring Community

Nancy built a strong community in schools where she was principal. One principal noted that this came from her need and desire to serve others. Another principal noted that Nancy had learned to give herself distance from her job because it was no longer her whole life, and she had balanced it with her home and family which were important to her.

Frustration/Anger

Some members of the group felt that Nancy was frustrated by a male dominated organization who could not understand how to react to strong articulate women. Nancy had overcome the narrow stereotypes by being mentored by a strong experienced female administrator and became her own person in spite of the obstacles she faced. This issue was a sensitive one for other group members who felt Nancy had achieved as much as they had.

My Personal Reflections

Nancy used this process of collaborative autobiography to understand who she was both personally and professionally. From her own positive experience with it, she saw it as a tool to use with her staff to create a community of learners and to engage the staff in a school improvement initiative.

By sharing her experiences with a group of administrative

colleagues Nancy said she had come to a better understanding of her professional and personal strengths such as courage, compassion, understanding and her ability to build relationships. She came to accept her areas of weakness and frustration with the lack of support in her job, and came to terms with isolation, anger and the insensitivity of others. From the sharing of her working reality, personal and professional past and aspirations for the future, Nancy understood and accepted who and what she was and she felt a sense of peace. Nancy also recognized that this collaborative autobiographical process helped the group of administrative colleagues come to a better understanding of their current practices in their schools and engage as a group in ways to improve them. Nancy also came to terms with the limitations of her job in that she could not solve all the problems that came her way but that she could be a person who could affirm, comfort and support those around her.

In her present school assignment as principal, Nancy had become more of an observer of others rather than a "doer" of things right away. In her previous placements as principal, Nancy described how she came with her own school improvement plan. After the process of collaborative autobiography Nancy choose to spend time working on building stronger and more unified staff relationships and taking on the role of facilitator for improvement projects rather than being always the initiator of them. The tool Nancy used to accomplish this

goal was collaborative autobiography. Nancy had learned to help provide the motivation and support for staff to work and accomplish their goals, rather than being the driving force. In the past, initiatives begun by Nancy stopped after she was transferred from the school. By creating a community of teachers who had ownership of the initiatives Nancy hoped these new projects would keep going long after she left the school.

Nancy also talked about how the group process helped her recognize the reality of conflict. Now, when Nancy engages in school improvement projects she and the staff work together through conflicts and problems. She realizes that this was part of the process of people working and learning together and she did not worry or take responsibility for other people's problems. She had come to realize that in all families there was conflict and disagreement and that was part of growth and development.

Nancy's view of her role of a leader in promoting school improvement had changed from that of instructional leader to that of a transformational leader as one who recognized the importance of motivating teachers in the varied projects that they engaged in. She had become more of a facilitator when engaging the staff in school improvement and felt comfortable in that role. Instead of her former role of instructional leader and master teacher she recognized the importance of tapping the wealth and richness of resources with the group of

teachers.

Collaborative autobiography was a tool for Nancy to accept and appreciate the richness of her experiences both in her personal and professional life and come to a new level of confidence as a person and administrator. This process also helped Nancy go into a new school and strengthen the sense of community by engaging the staff in the process and from this strong sense of community have the staff work on some school wide themes and improvement projects. Nancy no longer took responsibility for the success or failure of a project but she had learned to share responsibility for it and did not take it so personally.

CHAPTER FOUR

JANE'S STORY

The following principal's story is Jane's - a pseudonym for the real name of the person. This chapter will outline Jane's working reality, personal and professional past, and aspirations for the future. At the conclusion of the story, collaborative themes will be presented as identified by the entire group of principals, and as analyzed by this researcher. This story is told in Jane's words with changes made only to enhance the understanding and flow of the story. The accuracy of those changes has been verified by both "Jane" and one additional principal whose story was not presented here but who has audited these stories to ensure their validity. This story is the only one told by Jane.

Jane had been a principal before, taking time out for childrearing. She now is a principal with three years experience in an average size elementary school.

Jane wrote her story, and presented it to the group in that format.

Working Reality

The move from teacher to administrator is an interesting period of transition with a whole range of emotions that one experiences. I chose two themes to talk about.

Initiation. That's the first theme I picked. This is a story of initiation into administration. Did I want to be an administrator was the question I asked myself. Since there are openings, why not throw my hat into the ring? Did I want to be an administrator indeed? What did I know about running a school? I did know however, that it was time to move on - my time was up as a classroom teacher. My world had opened up beyond the classroom. The possibility of new challenges, exciting ideas, working with adults as well as children was there. Why not? I was up for the challenge. I was too young and inexperienced to even feel a twinge of fear. Ah, to be young and brash again, full of confidence, energy and enthusiasm! My initiation was simple. A tour of the school, a peek into the principal's office and a file cabinet drawer pulled out. There it is, it's all yours. It seemed very easy. Of course, this was 1973.

Of course the secretary would be there to guide the way, fill out the forms, order, answer questions and all, while I'd get about the job of administration. Hah, what a dream! The bubble burst a week before school opening. The secretary's husband was transferred and she had to go too. And so went the corporate memory of the school - 12 years in the community was whisked away elsewhere. Well I thought, a replacement would be no problem - there must be scads of school secretaries looking for a place close in. I'll just interview and choose one. I did the interviews, but not one among them

had any experience. I chose one who had not worked for several years but who had a cheery disposition, lots of common sense, maturity, enthusiasm and a willingness to forge blindly ahead with a principal who knew little more than she.

We dove into that filing cabinet and simply followed what had been done before. At least we had been blessed with an exemplary forerunner; everything was meticulously done and by the first day of school, we were set.

I had organized enough groups and elementary classes in the previous three years that the class set-ups and staffing were a piece of cake. Then came the bad news, I was going to lose a teacher. What? Lose a teacher?! Whatever for? In my mind the only organization possible involved the existing staff. What would happen to the grade one class in the morning? What about the principal's relief? I argued somewhat meekly and the teacher was whisked away.

I became the grade one teacher in the morning and the grade five-six teacher in the afternoon. The secretary, who was working along with me, was on her own. The job of administering the school ... unless I was there from seven in the morning until seven at night, I couldn't cope. I called for help but to no avail, I couldn't make anyone understand what was happening.

Two weeks dragged by, then three. I was working twelve hours a day, with a newborn baby at home, a new husband, a new house, the works.

One lovely fall day the co-ordinator arrived at the school and there was no one in the office, as the secretary only worked half- days. There was no administrator in sight. The co-ordinator, thinking I was in the grade five/six class, went on a search. At last he found me with the grade one's and was aghast. Finally he understood my predicament and I was given back a teacher pronto. I thought I might last in this business after all; both the secretary and I had survived September. The rest was down hill from there. So that's how I became a principal.

After having my children, I went back into administration for the second time. The first time around, I wasn't daunted by anything, because I knew nothing. We didn't have the courses, the different programs that now exist and there was no support. Before, you just said, "Yes" and that was it - you were a principal. You walked into a school and relied on the secretary. I counted on the secretary being there because I didn't know what the heck I was doing. It's a good thing I was young those days and had the energy to work for twelve hours a day. I mean that, I'd be a basket case! I never would have lasted the first week.

If this would have happened, five years ago, I wouldn't have stayed. I would have just said, "Thank you very much but I'm not going to do this." But you don't know any better.

Today you would have support, too. I mean now we have full time secretaries, we get relief time, we've got A.P.'s,

V.P.'s, it's like there's a whole network. I mean, if you fall on your face, you really fall on your face good. But in those days, if you fell on your face, who would blame you?

When I came back into the principalship, I never expected that I was going to be teaching grade one and then five/six. It was the planning that nearly did me in. I had to organize for two groups of kids, in three grades. I was teaching three grades a day and that was hard work. As far as the school part, we didn't do anything. We didn't have newsletters or school plans. I mean we just basically survived and there was the support of a parent community. Can you imagine, if I had been put in a community where the parents were really looking for things to happen. I just never would have made it.

When I first started in administration, I didn't know how to argue back. It was almost as if you didn't dare.....but, with experience, you got wiser on how to argue.

On my second time around, I was still pretty meek and mild about what I wanted, but in my new school placement I hit everybody the first two weeks of September and got what I needed. I wasn't nasty about it, but I just said this needs to be done and I expect that this would be taken care of and it was taken care of. The secretary was a superb lady; this secretary was really a neat gal. She hadn't worked for seven years until her kids all grew up.

Doesn't this story parallel what new teachers experience? Close the door and bang, there you are. They ask you a few

questions, you give them whatever answers they ask for, and then away they go. Basically, it is a fact of life that you learn by doing. You have a little bit of training, you have some common sense and then you set it up. I'm sure that some of them feel that they don't get the support or that people assume they can do all these things and how can they do them.

I feel that there is a difference for teachers. Maybe as administrators we are not there for them, but I see more teachers there for teachers than I see administrators there for administrators. There isn't the mistrust like there is with administrators. I see more camaraderie among staff than there is say for the beginning teacher to go to the principal. To go to the principal the teacher may feel "oh, oh, he'll know that I haven't got this down, so I really can't tell him that I'm really not sure how to handle this matter, situation or child".

Support is beginning to happen within the principalship. Even coming in this year, as a "beginning principal", I had several people phoning me to say, if something comes up and you don't have the answer just give me a call, or send me your timetable and I'll send you mine and then you'll know when I'm free and you can call and get through to me. Like those kinds of things are really helpful and special.

As an administrator, in larger schools you have another fellow administrator you can go to. Vice principals probably get dumped on lots. I don't find myself going to other

principals. One of our seasoned principals shocked me a couple of years ago when he said, he was lonely. He had no one he felt he could go to. I thought all this big front he always put up. We all need people.

Some assistant administrators are so competitive in trying to climb the ladder. It's a real dog eat dog situation. There is a fear that you're going to reveal something to them about yourself,be it a weakness or whatever, you don't want them to know because it can be used against you.

Some of the beginning principals are more open to sharing because they have come up the ranks with support groups, there has been some kind of rapport built with a few people that others of us have never had. It is being built in now.

Having been an administrator, there are 8 to 10 administrators whom I could call and ask what steps I would have to take about getting a support in a behaviour class. Some beginning administrators believe cultivating a relationship with your superintendent is important while other seasoned administrators disagree; although I have a working relationship with him, the superintendent would be the last place to go.

In talking about building relationships, I like to cook for my staff. This helps me bring harmony to my staff - it is something I learned when I was young. It helps me avoid conflict!

Another theme that comes out is that we are master teachers going into administration. There is a satisfaction as teachers which comes from having kids who have learned from what you do with them. When you get into administration, you think you carry all teaching skills with you but there are so many other things that divide your focus whether it is in planning of what you're going to teach, or the actual instruction. Although you protect your teaching time and say you can't be interrupted there are times when you have to be. When you smell gas in the school, you know you can't stay in the class and say it might go away. Or when a student in the hallway is hollering at a teacher with language you can't believe, you have to come out of the classroom and deal with it. Evaluation, you know what time that takes; your teaching is compromised and that builds a fair amount of guilt within me. You may be dealing with a child abuse case and after everyone has left - now I have to be in the classroom, a total shifting of gears into a high energy drain in the instruction and you are not ready for it.

Personal and Professional Past

As a kid I had a wonderful childhood. I lived in a small town of about 1200 people; my dad was a coal miner. My parents were both immigrants, my mother was Czechoslovakian - she came to Canada when she was nine. My father came from Italy when he was three months old. They were married when

they were fairly young. My mother was nineteen and my dad was twenty one. My dad was very active and involved in the community; he was a swimmer, a diver and a hockey player and we had a corral right outside our house.

All mining houses were like townhouses, 800 square feet houses, just a square unit with four walls. There was no plumbing, we had cold water but no hot water, we had electricity but that was it. So my mom used to have to haul water and in our house we ran the coal stove all the time for heat. But that was a kind of magic for me as a kid, that is how we all grew up, so I never really knew anything different.

My aunt ran a boarding house in town so they had a house with plumbing and a stove, fridge and the whole business. It was a treat for us when my aunt invited us up to have a bath in her bathtubs. When you live in a small town like that family and friends are all part of your upbringing. Everybody trusted everybody else and you had the run of the town so that eight, nine or ten year old kids would be out well past dark, and in the winter time we always went to the skating rink and we skated every night. On Friday nights we would always go to somebody's house and play monopoly.

As kids we did a lot of exploring; we would venture through the bushes. My dad always had us on horseback; he took us everywhere. We had lots of experiences, but had nothing - we were dirt poor. My mother was a wonderful provider; she was an excellent cook and everything always

tasted great - she always cooked and sewed and ran the household.

There is one situation which stands out in my mind. When I was a child my mom and dad parted ways for awhile. I remember my mother going away and she left my brother and me with my Dad. Mom went home to her mom and dad's place. My aunt on my dad's side took us everywhere with them and would babysit us. I remember going down the main street of town one day and as we were going up the steps of the general store, I saw my father and uncle having a fist fight on the main street. He wore his buckskin jacket with fringes on it, and to this day he still wears that old jacket with some of the fringes missing. I'm the only one in the family that knows the real story. My parents had their ups and downs but the kids didn't really know what was going on because everything was loving and caring when the kids were in sight, so any fighting must have gone on at night or when we were away from the house. A lot of it was due to my dad playing hockey out of town as he was on a team and my mother would be pregnant and be stuck home with the kids and a baby.

Another thing I remember about being a kid is I loved going to my aunt's boarding house. I used to stop there everyday after school and she had a wonderful Chinese cook who used to bake the most wonderful pies. Everyday when I went there we used to have a piece of raisin pie. At my aunt's boarding house she let me do things that my mother would never

let me do. My aunt let me set the table in the dining room and I could wash all the cutlery, she let me make sandwiches for the miner's lunch the next day. She let me fold towels, and she let me fold the sheets on the beds upstairs.

In the boarding house there were two rooms that were absolute treasures. They were the Chinese cook's rooms; one he slept in and the other room was jammed packed with things from Hong Kong. In the other rooms there was nothing but a single bed, a blanket and a wash table. These miners who lived there would shower at the mine, come home to this really lonely boarding house and that was a big fascination for me. I can recall going to the laundry area downstairs with the smell of the dryer sheets and the humidity, and in the winter time there would be thick ice on the windows down there. The boarding house was sort of a magic place, it was like a castle in my mind.

Another thing that stands out in my mind is how important family was. My grandparents on my father's side were the nucleus of the family. In their 800 square foot house aunts and uncles would come with all their kids for birthdays and Christmas. All the furniture would be taken out of the rooms and they would lay planks and doors on things to set up these fabulous feasts with some thirty two grandchildren. You can imagine all these babies, I was the oldest grandchild as well. Our parents would dress us up in our best bibs and shine us all up and braid our hair and we would all go to this

wonderful feast and my grandmother would cook, it was absolutely wonderful. The men went away together and didn't come until it was time to eat. I was the mother hen over tons of kids, my auntie Jane had several kids in six years including a set of twins. I don't understand how we all fitted into the house.

In my grandmother's cellar there were vats of olives, huge jars of wine, potatoes and all the canned jars. That was another magic place for me, when I read books that reminded me of my grandmother's cellar.

Another wonderful childhood memory was the barns beside the house. We always had horses in the corral. As kids we used to go up there and hang around the corrals. I remember on my seventh birthday, and during the birthday party one of our mares had a colt, so we were all standing at the window watching this horse being born and it ended up being my horse. My grandparents treated everyone the same and my parents were the same to us as well. In our family my grandparents treated boys and girls the same, that was because my grandmother was a strong person. My grandmother ran the household, she never got into the community as she never spoke English very well. As a little child I spoke three languages - Italian to my dad's mother, Czechoslovakian to my mom because she didn't leave the house and English.

When the mine in the small town closed down, my dad got hired by a moving company and so he moved all the families out

of the town. We were the last family to leave. CBC did a documentary film on my family as all the miners had to be retrained and reintegrated back into the community. I remember my family leaving the town in a little yellow jeep that my dad built. As a family heading to the city, we had no idea where we were going. My dad was devastated and although there is nothing left of that town, still to this day he talks about it as back home. As the family was driving away and knowing that you were never going back there, they put the gates across the front of the town so that nobody could get in. I have been back to visit twice but never wanted to go back. When the boarding house went that was it for me.

When we went to the city we moved in with my mother's mom and dad. My dad commuted to his job as a labourer outside the city. The move to the city was an absolute culture shock. Coming from a small town, I felt like a hick. I did not even know what "patrollers" were in Grade Six. There was real tension at home because my dad was not comfortable there. My dad had been totally uprooted, his whole life was sort of crashed down and with no education had to take labouring jobs. The next thing we knew we were moving to another city and moving in with my dad's parents. They had a two bedroom house that ended up with my grandparents living there, my aunt who was pregnant with her three kids, her husband who was working out of town, my mom and dad with four kids and a German

Shepherd. I wonder now where people slept. I do recall my brother and I slept out in the shed. My aunt had one bedroom with her babies, and my parents had the other. I don't know where my grandparents slept. Once again people came on all the holidays and the living room was collapsed with everybody on the floor. From all this comes the treasuring of the times I have alone; my parents can't understand that. When my kids visit their father, I enjoy my weekends home alone.

My grandparents bought a bigger house and we all moved in. After a time my dad found a stable job in the city. Again the same thing happened, everyone came to visit when they were in the city. By Junior High I started to resent living with my grandparents. I began to realize that other families had one or two kids in them, and there was a tradition of passing things down in the families. I realized that my grandparents and parents had no real tangible things to pass down.

My dad was not a risk taker and he grew up in times when he never wanted to get into debt so he saved and saved until he could put a down payment on a lot of land. Then all my mom's brothers who were carpenters came to help build our house. My parents still live in that house today. At the time my mother was pregnant again and she was not happy about it. I remember going and watching this house take shape, just walking through the rooms and smelling, I wanted a place of our own to live in, because all my friends had a home and I

didn't.

In our home, what support did we have? It was a loving environment. We did not have much, but we had a lot of love and my parents were devoted to the kids. My dad worked hard, and everything he earned was for all of us. We always had the best of food and my grandmother and mother were good cooks. We as kids didn't ask for things either. I did not have a bike, and all the kids had bikes, but I would not ask for one. My dad retired last year, because my mother said enough was enough. I really learned my work ethic from my dad. He always told me that you have to work and be loyal to whom you work for. He would go to work sick, healthy, no matter what the weather might be. In my dad's eyes it did not matter what you did - you always gave your best.

My mother was the reader in our home, and we always had opera music going on in our house. My mother was very clever. She was good with languages and good with words, she still reads and writes Czechoslovakian to this day. My mother was the disciplinarian in our home. As far as my mother's spirituality she watched church on T.V. and once in awhile went to church with dad. But my dad has never wavered in his faith. He goes to First Friday Mass, says the rosary and does all these things. He is a very private about his spirituality. I am the same, I also keep my faith close to me. My dad is very close to me and on the weekends he will come over and share both the awful things in our lives and the

great things as well. I am close to my mother at a different level, when I got married and started having kids then my mother and I started to talk together.

As far as my future at home, in Grade 11 my grandmother said I should quit school and go to secretarial school. I remember her saying that then I would have a car, a fur coat and a husband. It was considered a waste for girls to go to school because they were going to get married. As a kid I was interested in art, design and drawing and my most precious possession as a child was a box of pencil crayons. My uncles in another city were in construction and wanted to use my drawings to build a house but my parents would not let me go. First there was a problem with money and secondly no girl ever left home until she was married. I did register in the sciences my first year, though I didn't have any notion where I was going to go. I knew that I would be very happy getting married, being a housewife, have a large family, cooking in a lovely little house with a white picket fence, that would be enough for me At eighteen, if the right one asked, I would have said yes.

As far as teachers who had a great influence on my life,I don't recall many. My high school teacher I had for two years had a great influence partly because I was thirteen years old and away from home.

In going into education that was a sort of a crossroad in my life in terms of whether I was going to make it as a

teacher or not. I tend to be passive and hesitant and do not really like doing anything in front of large groups. I still don't. The thought of teaching, getting in front of a group of kids absolutely terrified me. My cooperating teacher must have realized how scared I was because she gave me a spelling book to teach a lesson right away and I was in front of the class. I stuttered and floundered for about three minutes and then found my way and was never terrified again.

My first teaching assignment was in a high needs school and I was in an intern program and taught everything at all the grade levels. During that year I did report cards and cum cards and it was an excellent learning experience for me. In my second year of teaching I can remember working with one principal who was a real risk taker. He taught me not to be afraid to do things differently and not to be afraid to take risks. I can remember some Senior Administrators coming out to the school praising the staff for the work we had done but at the same time saying the district was not ready for this kind of thing. I felt bad not only for the staff but also for the principal because he really wanted to do something with it.

The next important part of my career came when I was approached to teach a special education class and really enjoyed it. Then one day the language arts consultant touched me on the shoulder and asked if I would be a consultant. At that time I had five or six years experience and once I got in

the job I did enjoy it.

At twenty nine, I was getting a little panicky; all my friends were married and having kids. I had a great life but wanted a family desperately; I wanted to have kids. I did get married, and began to raise a family. In the meantime, the superintendent appointed me principal of a small school. I absolutely had no background or training, the only direction was the former principal pulled out the drawer of the filing cabinet. I counted on the secretary.

During that year I got pregnant with my second child, and was at home for six months looking after my mother. I decided to stay home and work part time for six or seven years. Somewhere along the way I took a district leadership course. A Language Arts consultant job came up again and colleagues asked that I apply for it. I was happy with half time. Having my house with full control was one of the things I loved to do. I filled out the application, got the job, and loved every aspect of it.

At that time on the personal level my marriage had dissolved, and my kids were at home and resented me being out at night so I gave up the consulting job for that reason. I went back into a school as a principal. I enjoyed my second experience as a principal. Once my marriage broke up it was really time to grow up. All the things I wanted for myself as a woman sort of dissolved. All I ever wanted was a husband, wonderful kids and a lovely home and everything else was sort

of extra for me. I taught because I loved to teach, not for the pay cheque. I taught because it was my hobby and I loved to do it but all of a sudden things changed. I had to grow up and face the fact there was not going to be a "sugar daddy" to take care of me any longer. I had three kids to take care of and I needed to make some long range plans for myself and for those three kids.

That has been hard for me. Even today I struggle with the whole notion of being alone, not having some old fellah in the rocking chair next to me watching our grandchildren. Marriage was supposed to last forever; it was the breaking up of the family album. For years there are no pictures of the family together and pictures of people missing as my family was a real cohesive family. I was brought up with the old country values where the woman stayed at home and worked only part time for extra things. I knew that I needed to plan, to think and concentrate on being good at something.

During that time I lived like a zombie, threw myself into my work, produced a textbook, worked at the job all day, came home took care of my kids and from 9 till 1 in the morning would write. Two supportive friends helped me during this time. They were there for me when everything was crumbling around me and I needed somewhere to go and I needed someone to talk to. One other strong friend said, what amazed her about me was the way I separated my life, I was the Italian mama and yet at work I was the professional, I was two different people

and I had to pull myself together and have more confidence in what I was doing in my professional life.

Enough time goes by and you start believing in yourself. My administrative work was no longer a hobby, it was something that I must do and I can do it and enjoy it as well. Part of what kept me going was that strong work ethic from my dad. I always tried not to let people down, no matter how crummy I was feeling myself, I always tried to portray to the community that I was together even when I would be dying inside. On staff, I would cook meals to bring the staff together, as that was part of my family tradition.

My family had a difficult time with the fact that their daughter would be divorced. It had to do with being the oldest and my family looked up to me, it was not that they did not support me, but I spent lots of time reassuring them that I was O.K.

My relationship with my former husband was very disruptive and it was the best thing when it ended, and probably should have ended earlier. We made each other and the kids incredibly miserable the last two years. If I had stayed in that marriage I would have to let my husband have the lead everywhere, and hand over my pay cheque. I did not drive a car when I was married and would not have gone anywhere by myself. I had a career before I got married and gave everything up so I would not be a threat to my husband. I tried to be a good cook, a good housekeeper, a good mother

and wife and all of a sudden you aren't worth anything. I resented that and my ego was totally shattered. In order to forgive, I went on retreat and for three hours wrote all my pain crying my eyes out and I let it go. My ex-husband has not forgiven and I worry about children's graduations, baptisms and weddings. My counsellor told me that he is an adult and has to come to terms with things himself and until then there is nothing anyone can do.

The Future

I am a frustrated artist and like to do things that give me great joy in life. I am not a great pianist but when I get to the piano I spend three hours there. The practical side of my life has always taken over and the need to support myself but at some point in my life I will put the practical stuff aside and say go for it.

For that to happen I am waiting for my kids to each complete their undergraduate degree and then I figure my job is done and I can let loose.

In my professional life I would like to be a vice principal of an alternative high school if I am going to continue in this system. I tried in the past to go to a high school as a Vice Principal after my year of study. I asked for a position but was told I had to be interviewed for the position. I refused as I had been interviewed for the Assistant Superintendent position and Senior Administrators

know what I want so I'll wait and sit and see what happens.

Collaborative Discussion

Jane viewed herself as a victim. All she ever wanted was to marry and have a family. She lost her husband and still felt after ten years on her own that she would never be happy unless she were to remarry. She felt that at her age and time in life there would be little hope for that to ever happen. Jane feels that she has to financially support her children until they complete university and because of this she can not be free until her children themselves are free. With Jane's rather depressed outlook on her life, and the fact that she always saw herself as a victim, they questioned if she would ever be free to do what she stated she wanted to do in life.

The men in our group had difficulty accepting Jane's view of leadership. They expressed that a leader had to work hard and often take unpopular stands in order to be respected in their school and among their peers. It seemed that Jane did not have the inner strength or self confidence to stand up to difficult teachers, students and parents and would instead bend in order to avoid confrontation. She wanted to be viewed by her superiors as popular and that bothered some principals in the group who had to often fight and take stands against their superiors for important issues in their schools. One member in the group often referred to the confidentiality aspect of the process with an underlying reference to Jane,

meaning that he did not trust her at first and felt she might carry stories to our superiors. This question of confidentiality was resolved by the second meeting, through the intervention of the facilitator, who reminded the group of the commitment to confidentiality signed at the beginning of the process.

As an administrator Jane enjoyed those aspects of her job that involved developing and improving curriculum. She often spoke of becoming a senior high administrator because that removed her from the daily conflicts and problems and in her mind, curriculum was of more importance at that level than at the elementary school. She also tried to become a Superintendent on two occasions to remove herself from the murky problems at the school level and move to a level where she perceived she could use her public relations skills. Those two attempts did not succeed. Jane kept looking outward for answers to her problems when the real answers were inside her.

Themes Identified by the Group

The group felt that Jane had to come to like, respect and appreciate herself as a divorced woman with children; she had to look for acceptance for who she was rather than for the school she had or the work that she did in the school. They felt that she had to learn to take risks even if she failed, and view those risks as learning experiences. Jane had to

leave some of her traditional culture and welcome and adopt new ways of thinking and doing things.

Some questions for Jane, the principal: could she combine her public relations skills with some good conflict resolution and become a more secure and balanced administrator? Could Jane begin to celebrate her accomplishments without always finding the dark side of things?

The four themes identified by the group are:

Family

In Jane's story family was the major focus in her personal and professional life. The celebrations in her family were most important and they helped to build strong family traditions that bound her family together. The breakup of her own marriage devastated her and she had yet to recover from this completely. In her professional life, her career always took second place to her family until her divorce. The realization than came to her that career had to take first place when she was left to bring up her children. The joy that Jane experienced cooking for her own family was now translated to her staff as a way of bringing people together.

Self Esteem

The group of principals noted that Jane was now beginning to find her own identity. In her marriage, Jane had lived in

the shadow of her husband and had no real identity of her own. By cultivating a strong working relationship with her superintendent, in order to aspire to a superintendent position herself, she believed this was building up her self-esteem. The group felt that she needed to continue to develop more inner strength to address conflict and problems directly rather than only making use of her public relations skills.

Jane suffered a series of dislocations in her childhood, regarding both place and space. She was happiest at the boarding house, with special tasks, and things not allowed in her home. Her talents for drawing were also denied to her at home. She, as a Language Arts consultant loved a job which gave her special tasks. She learned from her father and mother that loyalty and giving to others were important.

She felt at sea as a new principal, with no preparation, but didn't see it as different from teaching or anything else which would be learned on the job. Rather than administration just being a series of tasks to be done it involved putting principles into practice.

The Need to Develop Assertivness

Jane was uncomfortable taking risks. She was going to wait to be called to become a senior high school principal. The group suggested that she set up some goals and go for them, but she said that she would rather wait and see what would happen.

Loyal Service

From Jane's background, there was a strong commitment to serve the needs of others and to be a good employee. She was taught by her father always to be loyal to her employer. The group felt that it was time that Jane took up some issues and not always be waiting for someone to tap her on the shoulder and offer her another position. The group felt that in any organization there was a place for conflict and the questioning of actions taken and not always going with the tide.

There was a feeling of compassion and understanding for the difficult and public divorce that she had endured in the system.

My Personal Reflections

The process of collaborative autobiography helped Jane to take a close look at her personal and professional life and she begin to look at both the positive and negative aspects of it. Jane seemed to fall into some situations and always tried to use public relation skills in order to deal with things. From this process she began to appreciate the struggles and problems that other administrative colleagues encountered and began to take a closer look at herself both as a person and as a administrator.

Jane noted that it was not until the end of the process that she felt a degree of comfort to be able to share her own

divorce and the personal struggle she went through. She admitted that after ten years she was recovering but would never really get over her divorce. Jane admitted that prior to her divorce her personal and professional life was very separate, since her divorce they have become integrated. The school now has taken the place of the husband she does not have, she realized that she has to become stronger as a leader with people and make unpopular decisions and live with the consequences of them.

That is a large growth step for Jane who in the past used cooking for her staff as a way of bringing about consensus. Jane from this process was beginning to realize the importance of taking a stand on what you believed in and was beginning in this supportive collaborative environment to take some risks but felt by the end of the process she was just beginning to do deeper reflection.

This process afforded Jane the opportunity to openly share who she was personally and the most difficult time of her life that being her divorce. She had never before discussed it in a public way with a group of colleagues and this opportunity of letting go provided Jane with a source of strength. Jane's discussions of who she was as an administrator, of her cooking food for staff to smooth out problems and by listening to the observations that other administrative colleagues had allowed her to think about who she was as a leader.

What did Jane take back to her school and use with staff as a school improvement project? She talked about using a reflective journal with staff as a method to communicate the practices that staff engaged in the classroom and as a method for staff to use for their own professional development. Jane did not have the degree of comfort to use this entire process with her staff but she did feel comfortable using a reflective journal on a volunteer basis with staff, an activity that Jane was not comfortable doing in the past. In using this process in her school, Jane noted that some positive things happened with her staff that included sharing new insights into staff practices, a celebration of the learning in the classroom and as a vehicle used for teachers to speak in a safe way about their classroom practices.

CHAPTER FIVE

JIM'S STORY

The following principal's story is Jim's - a pseudonym for the real name of the person. This chapter will outline Jim's working reality, personal and professional past, and aspirations for the future. At the conclusion of the story, collaborative themes will be presented as identified by the entire group of principals, and as analyzed by this researcher. This story is told in Jim's words with changes made only to enhance the understanding and flow of the story. The accuracy of those changes has been verified by both "Jim" and one additional principal whose story was not presented here but who has audited these stories to ensure their validity. This is the only story told by Jim.

Jim is a principal of a large elementary school. He has over twenty-five years of experience in education. Jim told his stories orally to the group and did not have a prepared text.

Working Reality

I had great difficulty deciding which story to tell and in many instances the stories were about students, but I'm going to talk about teachers. I tried writing out this story but I just couldn't so I'm going to talk. Sometime ago I had

a young administrator on my staff who was also a good friend. He was doing quite well in his administrative role, and he was a good teacher but he didn't associate much with staff. Suddenly, it appeared that he was associating a lot with one of the females on staff, although they weren't in the staff room as much as everybody else.

Some of the people in this group who've taught with me know how strongly I feel about staff room conversation. I want people there to discuss light or heavy problems like religion or politics or whatever it might be but not student or parent problems.

This young fellow just wasn't there very often. I guess it was sometime later that another of my administrators asked me if I realized that these two teachers' cars were at the school quite often on the weekends? I indicated that I had not been aware of that, but maybe it was time that I started doing some serious checking.

Rather than confront anyone, I decided I'd just walk down to this gal's room with a reason to speak to her. I went down to her room at 8:00 o'clock in the morning and 5:00 o'clock at night, but the same sort of thing was occurring - she was still hanging around the office.

I thought in my own mind that I should hang around to try and see what was going on. I stayed until five or five thirty which I don't usually do. The young fellow came into my office two or three nights in a row and commented that I was

staying longer than usual. With these words, my mind began to work overtime. It appeared that he was waiting for me to leave so I would actually outwait them until they left.

Then my friend who lives in the area, phoned again and said that the cars were still there on Saturdays. I decided that it was time that I did something. I put a note in the administrator's mail box indicating that I wanted to see him at 3:15 the next afternoon. He came to me the next day and asked if it were all right if he brought his little son because his wife was dropping him off and he had to look after him. I said, no it wasn't, because I needed to talk to him and I thought it was serious. I indicated that I wanted to talk with him alone. He managed to have someone else pick up the child and he came into my office.

We started to talk; it was very difficult because I felt that something was going to occur that could ruin what I considered a good relationship between him and his wife. I knew them both well. This new child had just arrived and they were delighted with the little guy and I didn't want to see problems in their marriage. I also didn't want to see the young girl's life or career ruined as well.

While I was talking to this administrator, I was thinking about what right did I have to go to this person and say that what he was doing could lead to disaster? I had talked to my wife and she warned me to be careful as I was touching on something that is really personal. I felt that I really cared

about these people and having been around for the number of years I've been, I knew what could happen. After much thought, I decided that I was going to do it.

At the meeting, I indicated that it was important that he as an administrator was in the staff room more and not just meeting with one staff member. He said that she was teaching him how to play the piano and that he was teaching her how to play the guitar. He admitted that they were doing that after five o'clock and on weekends. He said that he didn't really care what other people said. I said that as an administrator he needed to care what other people think.

When I spoke to him I told him professionally every rationale I could use and that was very difficult because I had no proof of anything wrong except that he was giving the occasion for things to happen, and for talk in the community. If one administrator going by a school could notice these meetings - parents around the school would also notice. I went through all this with him and he denied anything could happen.

Then I really put myself on the line and talked about his relationship with his wife. I told him that I really cared about his wife and what is happening. I told him that I saw things heading in the wrong direction. I asked him if he talked to his wife and he said that he had and that she was quite happy that he finally had someone to confide in.

At that I was shocked and all I could say was I knew

where this could lead and I wanted it to stop. I tried the nice guy approach, the fatherly approach and everything I could think of without being obnoxious. I couldn't stop it going on anywhere else but at this school it had to stop. I told him that I didn't want them both there on weekends and at that he said, "What do you mean on weekends?" I told him that somebody had informed me that both of them had been here on weekends. At that he was very angry. I told him that he needed to be squeaky clean and that he couldn't give the occasion for somebody to believe that these things might be going on. He asked, "What about my piano lessons?" My only reply was, "Go get your piano lessons somewhere else buddy!" "But there's a piano here in the school." "I know there is but you are not going to use it. It shuts down at five."

Then I had to go to the girl and say I have spoken to this fellow and I'm concerned about where this relationship might be going. She told me that there was nothing happening. I told her that I was happy to hear that from both of them but that she had to be careful about what other people believe. I told her that she needed to follow my direction that says socializing happens in the staff room not in the office or in the gym - she had to believe that I want this staff to be a team - not two individuals who aren't associating with anybody else.

After that meeting, I was in a sweat as I knew that I was really taking a chance. They both could have come at me and

if the teachers' union had gotten hold of this I probably would have been in trouble. But I cared about both of them and I wanted to help both of them.

This fellow applied for a higher administrative appointment and my recommendation was that he was not ready for it based on maturity of judgement. On the other references he had higher recommendations so he got the higher administrative position.

Personal and Professional Past

Well I'm excited about my story. I was born on a farm in the west about some fifty years ago. We were very, very poor with six kids in the family. There was much violence in that life. My mother and father hated each other and there was alcohol but I never considered alcohol the reason for the violence.

In our home my mother was the really strong person, she could do anything that needed to be done, carpentry work or anything like that she did it. If dad did it, he'd put it together with bale wire and all kinds of things but he never did it properly. He couldn't do anything properly in mother's eyes and probably lived all those years with such an inferiority complex. I think the alcohol was an escape for him.

For all their years together until he died they were so unhappy but they stayed together for the kids. I think that

it probably only affected my one sister who was mentally ill although my parents didn't believe that it had any effect.

Reviewing my early years I started school when I was five in a rural school and had a great grade one teacher who I still keep in touch with today. She had about nineteen kids in the class from grades one to ten and our family was responsible to light the fires and that wasn't that long ago. In our family I was the only one starting school that year; my sister and four others were in grade two. In our school there was no need in keeping a student in grade one when you had kids from grade one to ten so I moved right into grade 2. One of the reasons I finished school just after I had turned seventeen and was teaching early was not acceleration - just expediency.

School was a fun time for me and although my mother and father did not have many happy moments together they loved their kids immensely. Schooling went on as usual and it was supposed to be over by grade eight because you had no where else to go. After this rural school, the nuns decided to take us. My brothers and I worked our way through school. We shovelled coal, milked cows, fed pigs, planted gardens and shrubs. I was thirteen at the time. So from the age of thirteen to sixteen I lived in a little shack on the side of the convent because the boys weren't allowed in the convent.

We were teased by the other kids because we had to work to stay at school. Our clothes were overalls because we were

farm kids. The nuns were so good to us. They took us under their wing and treated us beautifully. My uncles and aunts told my dad not to let us leave the farm. "They've got grade eight, they should stay home and work." My mother was strong and said that she wanted to have school and couldn't so her kids were going to have an education. We got twenty dollars a month from the nuns which would pay for clothes for myself and my brother and we worked so our two sisters could stay at school.

There was no money on the farm. We lived on the farm in the winter on hundred pound sacks of fish that were shipped down free - that was our food. We raised the animals we needed, my mother canned and we lived off the land.

A person who had a great influence on me in high school was Sister Tony. The plan was that I was going to become a priest. Anyone associated closely with nuns or priests was going to be religious. At sixteen I wrote away to be a priest, I was convinced that I had a calling. Two months before the end of grade twelve I decided that priesthood was not for me. I applied to go to teacher's college and a priest gave me two hundred dollars to go there and I was to pay him back when I could.

In my first teaching assignment I took over for the music teacher and my student marks were lower than the previous teacher. So when the reports came out an influential parent came to see the principal and wanted the mark changed on his

son's report card. The principal asked the parent to go and talk to me and I stood my ground and did not change the mark.

As I mentioned previously I have to tell a story about my wife Margaret and her faith. Margaret lived with her grandparents on a farm in the northern part of the province. Although we didn't live far from each other, we never met until I started teaching. She lived with her grandma and grandpa and would go to Mass everyday. On her way home from school, she'd stop and pray in front of the Blessed Sacrament. Anyway one night as she was praying the tabernacle came open. She had been thinking about becoming a nun and was praying to get an answer on the future. Margaret was convinced this was a sign from God that she was to become a nun. Margaret ordered her habit, and had her picture taken in her habit and was ready to enter.

At that same time her mother was pregnant with another baby and there was a fear that both mother and baby might die. Margaret got permission to go home and look after her mother and the baby and during that month decided she would not become a nun, but would go to teacher's college and become a teacher instead. Margaret went to the priest in her town and told him that she's decided not to become a nun but that she felt so terrible because the tabernacle had opened. Fr. Joe said "you know that thing used to come open all the time". Margaret had been so sure that God had sent her a message to become a nun.

Years later, our son was in a junior high religion class which was getting rather boring. He is a bit of a character. I guess in class they were talking about becoming a priest or nun. My son tells the class that his dad was a priest and his mom was a nun and they got fooling around and she got pregnant with him. He never said any more and no one laughed. It was dead serious in the classroom. Three months later the teacher came to me and said that he had heard a very interesting story. You must realize that our son was always doing crazy things when he was in school. It caused quite a laugh at school, and I always wondered how many people heard that story in the staff room.

Getting back to my career - after teaching one year I wanted to become a principal. Of course at that time you had to have a degree, and that bothered me because I knew that some people didn't have one. I wanted to get into administration very quickly. The superintendent told me that I couldn't until I had at least one degree. So for the first year we were married Margaret taught and I took the year to study. I took nine courses that year. You usually take five, but I wanted that degree so badly I just went after it. I ended up earning two degrees the year after we were married. Margaret got pregnant and quit teaching at Easter. We had no money coming in from Easter until my first pay cheque in September. I don't know how we survived, but we ended up in September not in debt but with not a penny to our name. When

the first cheque came, we had one baby and wondered how are we going to do this. We were living in a little basement suite.

As the kids came along we were not able to do things. Life is so backwards at times. The things that Margaret and I are able to do now, I wish we had been able to do when our kids were small.

We bought a two storey lovely house, but we had no furniture. An artist came through the neighbourhood pedalling his pictures and my brother sent him to us. We bought two paintings which we still have, but at that time we had nothing else. We were poor. We didn't have any money but we got by. What was different then was that all our friends were in the same situation - struggling - so it was fine.

Administrative Experience

As far as experiences of "principalling", I got a vice principal position a year after I got my degree and then the principalship the following year. I had good experiences in administration and I would move every two or three years. I remained in elementary except when I went to St. Agnes. My third year at St. Agnes they decided that it should become a junior high school, so I decided that I wanted to become a junior high principal and wanted to stay. I had been sent to St. Agnes to bring some conservatism back to the school as the tone of the school had gone to far the other way. We as a staff had accomplished that goal.

Another reason I wanted to stay at St. Agnes when it was to become a Junior High was that I had been branded an elementary principal and one who was good at it but I thought that I wanted to eventually move to a downtown position and I needed to get some experience at the Junior or Senior High Level. I met with my superiors and they said that there was no way that I could stay at St. Agnes. They offered me the opportunity to open a new school but said that they were bringing someone else to run the junior high school.

I went to the new school and had a good time and was able to choose my staff. Over all, it was a good experience for me, although both of my superiors, Dr. James and Dr. Will caused me no end of problems. There was conflict anytime I met or had dealings with them.

There finally came the opportunity for me to apply for the superintendency and I felt that it was time for me to move on. I sent in my application but I didn't even get short listed - If I was deflated after the St. Agnes experience now I was devastated. I met with my superior, Mr. Watts and he said that he didn't think I was really serious about applying. I told him that when I apply for something I want it. That year was supposed to be the year of the woman but that answer didn't make me feel good. I was really upset and it took the longest time to get over it. I then came to the realization that I really don't have that much time left before I retire. I'm good at what I'm doing, so I'll finish up my career as a

school principal and end my career happily.

The Future

This is my last year as principal and I am thinking about what else I would like to do once I get out of teaching. I know that I have to do something else. I am very healthy, and interested in doing other things.

My wife and I enjoy the life style we have now so I thought a job in politics might interest me. I mean everything I have done always had an alternative motive to it, I am always thinking what will I do later. I got involved in the Federal and Provincial political convention last year and it was suggested that I get involved in politics. I was to be an MLA in the next few years.

Before looking at going into politics I wanted to make sure that it will not change my relationship with my wife. Family support is very important for me and it is there for me.

We all struggle with self esteem. My mother I think caused that problem in our family because she was so strong and powerful. She controlled everyone, my father, all of us and the girls just went along and never learned to make a decision on their own or ever thought they were worth much, like my dad. In the family there were three boys. I was always the "third son". My older brother was number one, and my younger brother was number two and I was number three.

Finally, I think with this politics I am getting closer to the top.

Collaborative Discussion

Jim was a principal of a large elementary school. He had a dedication to his career as an educator and was proud of the work he did in the school. Jim was conservative in his values and had a moral conscience regarding the students and staff in his school. Jim avoided taking action quickly, claiming other priorities, but would intervene if the matter became serious.

Jim was a survivor and was an efficient administrator. Despite a poor and difficult childhood, career disappointments and challenges, Jim still brought a positive spirit to his school. Jim admitted to the group that he was not a great innovator as a leader but went into each school and worked and enhanced programs as best he could. He believed that the leader had to allow the teachers to be innovative.

As a group of administrators we respected and cared for Jim, both as a person and as an administrator. The feeling was that no one could really share any problems with him as he was busy in his own life and family and didn't have the time or energy for others' problems.

Because of his background of growing up in poverty, Jim was conscious of the necessity of supporting his family, so the fiscal reality of getting the largest school in the district helped him face his retirement. Positions that Jim

applied for were to help him in his later years so that he and his wife could enjoy retirement comfortably.

The group felt that Jim always wanted to be the person in control of the group with a strong sense of self. As the group sessions continued over a three month period, Jim saw that he did not have the strong sense of self that he had tried to project. Because Jim's mother was the strength of the family, Jim, throughout his life was seeking her approval and acceptance. The fact that he was going into politics and his mother approved helped his ego and self esteem and gave him some of the acceptance he sought from her all his life.

Themes Identified by the Group

Some questions that come from Jim's life include: Was Jim really happy as an administrator? Was there a balance between Jim's life outside the school and his work at school? Did Jim at the end of the process come to understand the influence his mother had over his life?

There were four main themes identified and discussed by the group. These were:

Service

The group felt that Jim's deep sense of caring helped the two teachers on staff who were having a possible affair as he felt that this may ruin their professional and personal lives. Jim had deep moral values that were established early in his life from the influence of the nuns who took his family in and

gave them an education. He saw himself as in charge; for example, consider his rules regarding the staff room. It was difficult to know whether scandal or a concern for others was the basis for his actions concerning the two teachers mentioned in the story. Jim served the students and community as principal and showed a deep commitment whether he were in a high or low socio-economic area. Principals in the group felt that Jim could relate to the poor as he had a similar background.

Self Esteem

Jim, during the entire process questioned why females of the group struggled with finding their own voice. At the last session Jim told the group that he had spent his entire life trying to please his mother and was always looking for her approval because he was "number three son". His revealing comments about self esteem and his recognition of being the third son may help explain why a career was so important.

Courage/Resiliency

Jim was hurt several times during his career in the system by asking for administrative positions, and being refused without being given proper reason. It took him awhile to get over those refusals but he always found the "positive" from each experience. Members of the group noted that Jim was forthright and showed honesty and was respected by colleagues

Jim brought to the group a rich administrative career and the group respected his honesty and insights that he shared in his personal and professional experience.

My Personal Reflections

Jim at the beginning of the process of collaborative autobiography gave the perception to his other administrative colleagues of self confidence and of knowing who he was both personally and professionally. He did not exhibit much empathy for the women in the group who were struggling to find their own sense of self and self esteem. He had to be reminded by others to allow the women administrators to have a voice to share their own insecurities. He felt that he knew who and what he was personally - a good family man who provided for his family, and professionally - a good administrator who ran an efficient and well organized school. Jim admitted that although he cared for his staff, he really had no time to get involved in their problems and that really wasn't his job.

In discussing how he could use this process for a school improvement initiative, Jim admitted that he did not feel comfortable sharing his vulnerabilities with other staff members. He felt at the beginning of the process that if he opened himself up to others that they would use it against him.

At the closure of the process, Jim discussed some of his

own vulnerabilities with the group, something he had not done previously. He admitted that his mother played a dominant role in his life and he always worked to please her. Even at the age of 55 he was still trying to measure up to the standards of his mother and began to reflect why he did this. Jim also saw the benefit of collaborative autobiography as a support network of professionals who were learning from the experiences of each other. As the group formed a cohesive and supportive bond, Jim felt comfortable bringing this back to his staff and using parts of the process with them. Jim who was close to retirement saw the potential of using parts of this process as an educational consultant with other groups of professionals. Jim admitted that whatever he did he would take and use this for his benefit and that of his family.

Jim saw growth in his own personal and professional life as he began to realize why his ego depended on pleasing his 85 year old mother. The process of collaborative autobiography broke down the walls of mistrust of sharing his vulnerabilities with others and also of listening to the needs of members of his staff. Jim took the first step on the journey - a willingness to be open to new ways of thinking and acting.

CHAPTER SIX

JOAN'S STORY

The following principal's story is Joan's - a pseudonym for the real name of the person. This chapter will outline Joan's working reality, personal and professional past, and aspirations for the future. At the conclusion of the story, collaborative themes will be presented as identified by the entire group of principals, and as analyzed by this researcher. This story is told in Joan's words with changes made only to enhance the understanding and flow of the story. The accuracy of those changes has been verified by both "Joan" and one additional principal whose story was not presented here but who has audited these stories to ensure their validity. This is the only story told by Joan.

Joan is a principal of an elementary school with four years experience. Joan had her story prepared in written form for the group.

Working Reality

The following is my working reality since the end of October. This story is about a family in my school - there's a mother, father and four children. The oldest child is eleven and the youngest is a three year old. The children range in age from eleven, nine, five and three years. So

three of the children are/were in my school.

To give some background, this family was always, even before I got to this school, known for being "different" and really caused a lot of problems for the school. When I arrived at the school, I knew that I'd have to tread lightly as there were letters on file, saying that they demanded that their child be placed in a certain classroom. This was my first introduction to this family.

My dealings were mostly with the father and not really with the mother. The father always came in for interviews and the mother was in the background. She seemed to be the one making phone calls or the father would say, "My wife said that I was suppose to check on...such and such"

In my second year at the school, during one of the interviews, the father said, "I've held this in too long. I have to let people know what's going on in my home." He said, "You know, my wife has a lot of problems, she has hormone imbalances and she's suffering from PMS and sometimes she does crazy things." He then said, "I just can't keep this hidden any longer." At the meeting we all sympathized with him as we knew that she was a little different.

About two days after the interview, Mrs. G. phoned me and she said, "I finally kicked my husband out, he's an alcoholic, he's no longer in the home and everything will be much better." So at this point, we at the school were wondering who was the sane one and who was the crazy one here as the

husband had us totally convinced that everything was his wife's fault. They ended up going through a separation which was very nasty. The husband went to live with his wife's parents and still does, two years later.

Mrs. G. has no family that supports her because her parents have taken, as she says, "that monster" in. She has no brothers or sisters. She has alienated all of her neighbours because she had called the police on them at one time or another because they were doing something to her children. She still lives in the family's house. I can see the house from my office and it's the only house on the street that has a wire fence up around it.

Mrs. G. then turned to me as her "best friend" and she would phone me about the most ridiculous things, like her three year old got into some paint, what should she do about it? She had no one else to call.

Mrs. G. always communicated through letters. There was always something strange about this so I kept all the letters. I thought that someday, I'm going to end up in court with this one. I had a funny feeling about it. She was very much into numeroscopes, into predicting the future and telling me what kind of day I was going to have.

I recall one of my first meetings with her when she came into my office and said, "Umm, there are very good vibes in here." At that, I knew that I was not dealing with a lady who was quite alright. She claimed that she was psychic, as she

always gave me numeroscopes on her children and what they would turn out to be and what their karmas were and the whole bit.

I would put up with it, but I always wondered that if she was so perceptive, how come she didn't know I thought she was crazy. At this point, everything was fine - we were "best friends". The oldest child had no socialization skills; he didn't get along with anyone and didn't have good role models. He would often be in trouble on the playground and he would come in and start telling me these stories that were wild tales about what went on at home and how he was feeling about life and everything else.

Things got worse this year. October 30 will be a day I'll remember for the rest of my life. Mrs. G. phoned the school and claimed that one of our grade six boys, Bill W., had beat up on her two boys after school in the park behind her house - which is a distance from the school - and told me I'd better do something about it.

The next day I talked to the boys to find out what was going on and I drew the conclusion that her boys, James and Don, decided to get Bill in trouble so they lured him into this fight. During the fight, her son Don got a bloody nose so he ran home to let his mom know. She came out of the house grabbed Bill by the back of the hair, hauled him to her house, kept him there until the police came. She wouldn't allow him to phone his parents and wouldn't allow him to do anything.

She told the kids to quickly get the block parent sign out of the window as that gave her the authority of the police. She told the kids to get the Bill W. file because she had files on all these people in the neighbourhood.

At school the next day, I felt all these boys were equally guilty as they were all in this together. So they were kept in at recess and we talked and then I kept them after school. I sent her two boys home first so they wouldn't feel threatened, as she was starting to write letters about how her boys were threatened. Bill W. stayed until his father picked him up.

To make a long story short, Mrs. G. felt I didn't handle the problem properly and she started a letter writing campaign and started to find that absolutely everything we did in that school was wrong. She wrote to the Superintendent and also to the trustee. The accusations in the letters ranged from accusations of locking children in storage rooms to hitting her child, and she was taking this to the police.

The letters were so bizarre. Two of them I turned over to the police because they could be taken as threats. One of the letters said "Take heed of my grave warning. You'll wake up one day and come to school where you will see in your classroom on all the walls, yes Mrs. Jones, all the walls will be kicked full of holes by John Kelly's father's ghost." Obviously this woman had some serious problems. What she was accusing us of doing to her children, we felt that she was

doing to them.

In one situation, James refused to go home from school. He told us that his mother is crazy and he didn't want to go home. We called Child Welfare and explained the situation to them. The child then said, "I'm sorry, I can't talk to social workers because my mom won't allow me to unless she knows about it." The social worker called Mrs. G. to say that they would bring her child home and they wanted to discuss some of our concerns with her. On hearing that, Mrs. G. said, "I'll put on a pot of tea and we'll have a conversation." The social worker did not report back to me about what happened.

The next episode happened when one of her kids came running back at the noon hour saying, "My mother is nuts, she's turning the water hose on me." The mother told her son that the principal put her son out, sort of like a dog. That was not the case, the boy was coming to school without his shoes on, without a coat in cold weather, etc. So as principal, I contacted the social worker and indicated there were some serious problems and a need for intervention. The social worker told me the problem was between me and the home. She indicated that it had nothing to do with what was going on in the home. Meanwhile, the child was not attending school and she was covering for him by saying he had barricaded himself in the bedroom or giving other excuses.

When the eleven and nine year old boys barricaded themselves in their rooms, the mother would try to ram the

door to get them out. When she did get them out, she would take their clothes and throw them out into the street. The kids were to pick them up and then go off to school.

Our system social worker got involved because of irregular attendance and said there were some serious problems in that home. The year previous, one of her sons came to school with marks on his face from her slapping him and she wrote me saying, "Yes, I slapped him, it's the only way I can control him." At that time she had three young social workers working with her, but she either dismissed them or they left the case for whatever reason - one was due to stress, another took a job somewhere else and the third wouldn't have anything to do with her. After that she was not getting any outside help or support so it was just her and the four children.

Our system social worker again contacted Child Welfare and said, "Look, I believe there is a problem. I've got some documentation to prove there's a problem." Our social worker said, "I would like to meet." But they never did meet. Meanwhile the mother continued to write all kinds of accusations against me, against the school and threatened us with the police.

My direct supervisor did meet with her. She refused to have me in the room and he refused to have me leave the room. I sat at the meeting and we came up with some agreements, one was that she was no longer to communicate with me by phone. He didn't specify contact by letter, but I no longer could

take phone calls from her or she couldn't talk to me on the phone. The agreement was that she was supposed to talk to the secretary who was to take a message. Mrs. G. was really angry at this directive so after the meeting she changed her mind and started on the letter writing campaign again.

My boss was always supportive of me and realized that she was crazy, just in reading her letters. He always told me that if it really got bad they could get a restraining order against her. I thought the restraining order may not be the answer because she had to bring her ECS child to school and pick him up so it didn't seem logical.

One of the older boys ran away the beginning of December when she put him out one night. He ran away to his grandparents, where his father lived. The boy stayed the month of December with his grandparents. Mrs. G. accused the school of driving him out. At our previous meeting with my boss she had to agree that her son must attend school as he'd never get through Grade four unless he came to school. She said that the school didn't plan to teach her child, they already made up their mind, therefore, she wanted him in a special education class. He was tested by our system consultants and during the testing had to talk about how he was disciplined. He went home and told his mother that the consultant made him write down the things that his mother did to punish him.

From the report, the boy can do the work but there is so

much going on at home he can't concentrate. As of last week with the father's help, Social Services took a stand and placed him in a group home. But we still have a crazy lady in our school with three children whom I fear for in that house.

The social worker contacted me last week and continued to insist that there was no problem in the home but was very cautious what she was saying to me. I was ready to strangle her and she said that further documentation was necessary before the other three children would be removed.

Mrs. G. sent me five letters this past week asking the demons to do something with this lady. She also asked how many suicides I was responsible for. I turned the letters over to the system lawyer as he is going to take some steps against this woman so she can no longer harass me. This story cannot yet be completed as the three children are still with her. Her husband claims that she's crazy and yet he hasn't done anything about getting his children back or out of that home. It was convenient for James to live with his grandparents but they go south for the winter. He now has to go back to his mother. The next boy to James (aged nine) appears to be influenced by the mom. When I was on supervision he told some kids that his mom said I was bad and she put a curse on me. He said, "If my mother had a piece of your hair, she could make a doll of you". It worries me about the environment that these children are living in and my fear is that something very bad has to happen before someone is

really going to listen and do something.

Personal and Professional Past

In my family there were seven children and I was the third child. It is almost like three separate groups in my family with three children, a five year gap, two children, and another five year gap and two more sisters. My parents were farmers and are still on the farm: they just remodelled the house a bit or added on to it. It was very important that the three oldest have a good education and amount to something. So the three oldest all have degrees from universities and have good jobs. For the next two in the family, mom and dad were doing better financially and were able to give more, so it wasn't quite as important for them to go out and fend for themselves. They have technical papers, one from Mount Royal and one from secretarial school. Then things got really good in farming and the two youngest are "bums" or that is what I call them. One of them, with her husband and three children lives with my mom and dad and the other lives across the road from my parents.

My whole upbringing was that you had to work hard and have good grades. My first six years of school were at a country school, 3/4 of a mile from home. There were ten students in the school in grades 1 through 8. The Grade One teacher boarded at our house. When I look back I guess I always had to act in a certain way because the teacher was

always there. Our Grade 3 teacher lived in the teacherage, but still spent his time at our house which I really resented. So one time I made up this lie that he forced me out in the cold at school and my cheeks froze. This resulted in me getting myself into trouble for telling the lie.

One thing I recalled about Junior High was when my little sister started school, every time she cried they would come knock on the door and say please do something with your sister. After completing high school, I spent two years as an art student, still leaning toward a Bachelor of Commerce. In my second year of university I met my husband. During my third year I went into education. I got married that fall, completed my education degree while my husband completed his engineering degree. University was something I tolerated, I have never been a very good student, I was always more mathematically minded.

That is how I got into education, more like, "What else could I do"? Getting out of university after four years was one of the best things I could do. My husband had a job in a western city as an engineer and I had planned to do substitute teaching. On the second day of school I got a full time teaching job. For the first week of school until the school was organized I worked as a teacher's aide. During those first two years I had two excellent teachers whom I was able to work under and learn from. When the regular principal came back from sabbatical, she had a good influence on me.

I moved residences so I wanted a move close to home and was placed in a new school. I helped open that school and enjoyed starting right from the ground and building it up. Over the six year period at that school it changed from a comfortable school to a miserable one by the time I left. The reasons may have been the change in administrators, and a difficult experience with a student teacher whom I failed. She wrote letters to downtown about me, and is presently a teacher in our system. During this time, I wanted out of teaching so I started taking Commerce courses at night and received top marks. But I decided that I liked working with people, and maybe the teaching situation was not that bad. A couple of times I tried to switch to junior high but was always turned down.

When another new school was opening and since I loved starting a new school, I went for an interview and was placed there. My first year was difficult due to surgery I had early in the school year. I didn't get to know people due to the time I was off school. I took on a religion coordinator job as the principal was good at believing in me and trusting me and knew the staff would listen to me. During my third year in the school, assistant principal positions evolved and the principal and vice principal suggested that I put my name in and go for it. The Personnel Department decided to have me skip the Assistant Principal position and I was appointed Vice Principal.

Administrative Experience

My first administrative appointment was with a principal who liked to work as a team and I learned a lot about running an organization and how to deal with staff. What helped me at that time was I signed up at the university and took courses on self esteem and it made me feel better in what I was doing in the classroom and how I could reach students.

My next move was to a large elementary junior high school. I was able to teach grade seven and grade six math. The school had a change in administrators and staff had difficulty accepting it. If staff needed to complain they came to me. A lot of staff problems had to do with student behaviour so we had some cleaning up to do. The complaints were also against the principal and I became the buffer to make sure everything was running smoothly.

Then one eventful day I got a call from one of the Senior Administrators to take on a principal position. Other people were believing in me so maybe I was not believing in myself that I could do this. In going into my first school as a principal, the Vice Principal had the same administrative experience as I, so I knew there may be problems. I went in there thinking I know I can do this job, people believe in me, I can do it, but I seemed to have to look over my shoulder with this vice principal who was always reminding me that I had no more experience than she did, and that she was ten years older than me. We lived and worked with that attitude

for two years. I got a new Vice Principal who worked with me as part of a strong team. Staff had always come running to me and have not paid attention to the other person. Now it was a nice break for them to have trust and faith in the other administrative person without undermining me. So the people who have influenced me have caused me to stretch myself and go further saying, "You bet I can do this, just because you said I can't I will prove to you I can." My self esteem has to be built up all the time even to this day with courses and listening to speakers.

In my family, my father was too busy earning a living on the land to be around much when I was growing up. My mother got married at sixteen and was nine years younger than my father. My mother was the one who was always home with us. My grandfather on my mother's side was an alcoholic and worked on the railroad so was not around much. My grandmother ended up with a nervous breakdown due to my grandfather's alcoholism and it was my mother who raised her three younger siblings. So they lived at our home. So there was always some adult living in our house, if it wasn't the school teacher, it was these people.

My cousins on my dad's side went into Grade 8 with a Grade 3 reading level. They were dumped at our house and my mom would help them. Although my parents had Grade 8 and 9 education they were readers and my mother was into numbers. Mom kept the books, did income tax, and there were always

books and reading material around, so that was a model for us too.

As far as discipline, I do not recall my dad ever hitting us. It was my mom who would swat us if we were in trouble. Yet my dad was the sensitive one, he would be the one with tears streaming down his face if something touched him, while my mother didn't show emotion, she came from a very cold family. Their relationship had its ups and downs depending on the economics at the time. My mother always had the big gardens, looked after the animals and sewed all our clothing. We didn't swim or skate as children but played family games and watched T.V. I really resented other people always living with our family. In the winter, my alcoholic grandfather would come back to our house to live and my mom would dry him out, fatten him up, and then he would go home again. I resented outside people coming to our house as it disrupted the pattern of things.

As I recall now, it was my mother who took in all these people. Even now she has taken in my sister, her husband and three children. The doctor said that she is supposed to walk a mile a day for her health. I said to her, well do it, and she said it was a little hard because she had a little one to look after. I asked "Where is the child's mother?" She said that she was volunteering at school, so my mom is still taking care of others. Sometimes I see myself in that role.

For me when my self esteem is high, I'm O.K. but if my

self esteem dips a little, then there are problems. I'm giving and not getting back. That is why I feel I have a weight problem. We give out and the only thing we get for satisfaction is food. That is why education is a good place for me, there are kids there. I can take care of these children, I cannot have any children of my own. I also nurture my husband who is an epileptic. He doesn't drive and depends on me to take him to work and pick him up. I really enjoy working long hours, I enjoy having things laid out and like to see them get checked off my "To Do" lists.

In my school, I have had teachers work on self esteem committees and what we can do to make sure we are on the right track and ways we can build staff self esteem. In the school I offered to pay half the cost of a book on self esteem for each staff member, and the teachers have taken me up on it. So self esteem is very important to me.

The Future

The future for me is that a lot of things have just fallen into place for me. It is not because I have set goals for this to happen. Setting goals is something that I am going to have to come to grips with. Whatever the situation I give 110%, so whatever position I get into, I will do a good job. Right now things in my life are fuzzy and it goes back to my self esteem.

I went to a speaker last week who got me thinking as we

were talking in the group, of looking within ourselves, and not having to prove myself in my job, but to honour and celebrate who I am. This process has helped me look at who I am and look into my past to understand who I am. I realized that I was very much like my mother in my need to take care of people, as I have looked after my three sisters since I've been here in the city. I will take a boarder into my home in the fall.

At home I did everything, I never gave my husband a chance, I have a Type A personality. I began to insist that my husband do the vacuuming and he would complain, so I would do it for him. We continue to eat out and have cleaning people come to the house because I do not have the time or energy to do it. Right now my husband is unemployed and running his own consulting company and volunteering his services as an engineer. Due to his epilepsy he doesn't have a strong memory so he does things over and over again, otherwise he will forget. Because of his memory problems I do not move things around in the house because he would not know where things were. So I have taken on the total management of the house.

Professionally I am looking for a move to another school, I would like a large school.

Collaborative Discussion

Joan as principal of an elementary school liked to be viewed by staff, colleagues and senior administrators as a person who was in control of all aspects of her school. She talked about how she enjoyed the power that she exercised as a principal and this sense of power was a justification for what she did as an administrator. Joan prided herself as a workaholic and became involved in parent, staff and student problems. In her discussions, Joan often compared herself to her mother who looked after others all the time. Like her mother, she had full control over her home environment.

The group felt that Joan's need for control of situations at times presented her with problems. Some of the parents Joan had to work with as principal had serious emotional problems and did not appreciate or tolerate this power and control base Joan operated from. She often did not take effective and immediate action on problems and in one case was bothered by a particular parent over a two year period. In such a power struggle, Joan often lost control and did not have strategies that would allow for reconciliation. She cared deeply about her school and was coming to realize when she had done enough when dealing with a parent. When problems did not get resolved Joan seemed to find pleasure in telling her story to other colleagues and looked for others to help her understand the situation.

Joan's view of administration, from her interest in business, was that of a business manager. She told the group the she went in with a list of things to do each day and enjoyed clearing the check list at the end of the day even if it meant working until seven or eight o'clock at night. Because she was viewed by her colleagues as a workaholic she did not spend time in developing a supportive network to call on when things became difficult, so she felt that this process helped her.

From her own personal past, Joan always wanted to be recognized at home and resented all the people who came into her home because she wanted the attention. It seems that lacking attention there and lacking a sense of personal worth carried into her professional life as an administrator.

Some questions that come to mind about Joan as principal is why she had to spend so much time at school? Had she found a sense of balance of work and play and if not, why not? Why was Joan so involved in the lives of others or was looking after others allowing her not to look deeply at herself and her own fears? Would Joan ever find a sense of well being about Joan as a person and Joan as an administrator?

Themes Identified by the Group

There were two themes identified by the group. These are:

Self Esteem

The group felt that Joan struggled with self esteem in her personal and professional lives. When things were going well she was fine but when she faced problems, she lost all sense of who she was and what she believed in. The eating disorder that she had was attributed to her lack of confidence. She frequently went to workshops on self esteem as if it were a commodity that could be purchased. She also had her staff buy books on self esteem to improve their own self esteem and for use with the students. Although these were excellent efforts in themselves, the group noted that Joan should work on finding inner peace and strength within herself rather than always looking outside for it. At the end of the process, Joan began to listen to the suggestions given and the process allowed her to begin to think about self esteem.

Service

The group noted that Joan, like her mother wanted to care for and protect people. Although this is an excellent quality in itself, they thought that she took the role of service too far in her role as principal because she tended to want to control all situations and control people who worked for her. In the case of the problem parent she let the situation go on and on and became so involved with the family that she could not step back from the situation. In the group, her fellow

administrators expressed concern to her that this "workaholic" involvement in her job would lead to her own burnout and they suggested that she try to find other things in her life to help enrich her life. The group felt that she should delegate more to others and broaden her narrow perspective of work as being her life. The group felt that Joan could be happier if she were not so worried about pleasing others and becoming the next superintendent. She was so involved in school after hours and on weekends it left little time for her husband and her own personal life. It was suggested that she take things easier and learn to honour and respect herself and who she was and not the next job promotion.

My Personal Reflections

Joan as an administrator wanted to be viewed as a person who was in control of situations and had her finger on every aspect of the school. She was the school matriarch and had great difficulty delegating to others the job of getting things done - everything had to go through her.

Joan really didn't have a personal life as she spent twelve hour days at the school and what time she did have outside of her school was devoted to her husband who was not well. When all things fell into place the way she wanted them to according to her checklist and plan, she was fine. When Joan encountered a difficult parent or teacher her self esteem had major problems. She spent her time climbing the ladder

and wanting to be recognized by her superiors instead of honouring and respecting herself and her gifts. Joan created dependent relationships in her personal and professional life, whether it was at home with her husband or at school with staff. Joan did not have a network of colleagues that she could call on for support or a group of friends outside the school, the school was her life.

As far as working on school improvement projects, Joan initiated all projects and took full responsibility for the success or failure of them. Joan believed her staff supported her in these projects but she kept a close check on every aspect of them, delegating few aspects to them.

Over the course of the process of collaborative autobiography, Joan began to realize that she needed to give her staff more ownership of school improvement projects and not take everything so personally as a reflection of who she was. Joan felt that she wanted the process to continue beyond the twenty one hours as she needed the continued support both in her personal and profession life. Joan had a willingness to give her staff more ownership of school improvement projects but did not feel comfortable engaging her staff in the process.

The process of collaborative autobiography gave Joan an opportunity to begin to reflect on her personal and professional life and explore ways she could make improvements. Although the actions taken seem small to others

they were major moves for Joan.

CHAPTER SEVEN

PRINCIPALS' EVALUATION OF THE PROCESS

At the conclusion of the twenty one hours of dialogue each principal evaluated the process in writing immediately upon completion. The second part of the evaluation on what effect the process had on their administrative practice took take place six months later.

The following four questions were asked of each principal:

1. How have the sharing sessions helped in your personal and professional life?
2. Have these sessions helped to affirm your administrative practices or foster new insights into your practice?
3. As a group of principals working through this process of sharing your stories and experiences, have we as a group helped to empower each other, and if we have, how has this helped you at the school level?
4. Rogers (1961) noted that experiences that involve the learners' genuine self results in lasting significance. Please feel free to summarize and share the positive and negative aspects of this process.

Evaluation of the Process

Immediately upon completion of the process some of the responses from principals included the following.

Principal 1.

"The writing up of my working reality, pedagogy in use, influences of the past for discussion made me realize how the recording of all the details of an incident is helpful in clarifying the problem. Also in reflecting upon what was tried and why, the details of an incident are helpful in clarifying the problem and there began to emerge a very clear pattern of beliefs that form the basis of a personal philosophy of what is essential to learning.

Listening to the presentations of the others gave me a sense of underlying concerns that are common to many problems and that must be addressed if there is going to be a long term effective resolution of problems along with job satisfaction. These include philosophical compatibility, anger, fear, stress, guilt management, meaningful communication, adequate support systems at every level, the role of personal humour, strength, courage and judgement, the balance of emotion and logic and individual and group ownership whether staff, student or parent.

The reflection I have done before and after each of the sessions has facilitated and complemented many elements of another leadership program which I am currently involved in.

The practical strategies that were shared involving effective practice were extremely useful and relevant. As a result of this experience and the strong belief that I have regarding the importance of shared decision making and reflection - in - action. I have sought to create an atmosphere of collaboration, relevance and openness in all our meetings whether regular staff, early dismissal or professional days. Written reflection compiled and shared has become a regular accepted procedure after all these meetings.

With the students, a friendship club, a problem solving room that can be booked into, cooperative learning groups and metacognition strategies are all important in empowering students through experiences that involve the learners' genuine self."

Principal 2.

For another principal the sharing sessions helped him especially in his personal life as he was able to focus on aspects of his life that have contributed to his feelings toward his mother. Professionally, he was learning to nonjudgementally listen to individuals tell their stories.

"Some positive aspects of the process was the mix of male (3) to female (4), varied administrative experience over three decades, varied personality types, the six of the group (7), the format presentation, questioning, discussion, all combined to provide for rapid bonding which led to a trust and comfort

level that enabled meaningful, open and honest sharing. I felt a genuine caring support system reaching out to me and was touched by the compassion and empathy, demonstrated by all participants. The bond carried over into other interactions outside the group. It has helped to further develop my confidence and has contributed a sense of acceptance as a competent professional.

The fact that the leader modelled from her own experiences was very useful. Her encouragement and assurances were also instrumental in providing a safe, open, risk free environment."

Principal 3.

"The getting together with other colleagues to share and understand them better was positive. I also like the idea of being able to get others to understand me better also. We were forced to reflect on how we look at things and at ourselves and often we do not take the necessary time to do that. The idea of sharing how to handle different situations is very helpful and through these sessions we had that opportunity. I like the sessions being focused each with a different assignment.

The process did force me to come to grips with some things in my professional life - things I am still trying to get a handle on. I think this program should continue for a longer period, perhaps monthly, to have a more lasting

effect."

Principal 4.

"At first I experienced some degree of apprehension when we first began the process. I was concerned regarding the depth and degree of personal disclosure. Very little time had elapsed in our first session before the trust relationship had been established. I looked forward to each session and regretted when the last session ended. There was nothing negative about the process. This process could be linked with spirituality and administrative mentoring."

Evaluation Six Months Later

After a six month period I asked the group to come together and share what impact the process had on them. I asked each of them to reflect upon how the process had helped them, either in their working reality, understanding their personal or professional past or developing their future plans. I also asked for any shortcomings in the process. We met for one and a half hours to collaborate and reflect.

Joan noted that her working reality was a little different since her focus was no longer on the one parent who had consumed most of her time the previous year. She did admit that she continued to deal with dysfunctional children and parents which really cut into her day. She gave as an example a parent who came into her office and spent forty five minutes with her.

This year Joan was not listed on the teaching schedule because of the large number of students and the many problems she has to deal with. She continues to believe that school has to be a safe place for teachers and children and that school can make a difference in children's lives. At home Joan now has a university student living with her who is taking social work. She enjoys that situation, because she can come home and relate what is going on at school. Her university student feels Joan is doing social work and is using her for one of her assignments.

The process has allowed her to look within herself and make some plans for herself instead of going day to day. She has some insecurities about being able to use the process with a group of teachers. She does feel that she is no longer alone, that other people have gone through similar situations and are still surviving them.

The future for Joan included either remaining in her current placement another year and then requesting a new school or branching out into an elementary-junior high school placement. A new school had always interested and appealed to Joan and has been an unfulfilled dream for her but at the end of the year she accepted a transfer to a small junior high school.

Jane spoke of the process as important to her since she got to know her colleagues personally as well as professionally. She noted this was accomplished by sharing

some history and problems, and by a closeness which developed in this group through understanding each other. This process helped Jane to accept herself. "We put a wall up, this professional mystique in that people see us one way, but behind that wall we are dying and feeling phoney, now I accept myself".

"Going into school this year, it is my second year in the school, I feel that I can make an impact. It was not until Easter time of last year that I began to feel comfortable, and I now have a sense of belonging. It was a tight knit community and it was difficult to break in. With the teachers on a large staff, I began the process of having them write in a reflective journal. Some teachers have difficulty speaking up in a large group and don't have input into some decisions so I give them the opportunity to write to me. It gives teachers the opportunity to agitate on paper and an opportunity to communicate with me their thoughts. They can also include in the journal professional and personal goals".

At the end of the year, Jane was offered a larger elementary school, but refused this placement because she wanted to move to a senior high school.

Jim saw the process as a positive experience for him. The process reinforced the importance of encouraging collaborative sessions with teachers in his school. Jim came through the process with a better understanding of himself and why he was always trying to please his mother. He decided

that he wanted to break out of that mould. This was Jim's last year in education and his focus was to become an MLA for the following year. Most of his free time was spent on the campaign trail and he had much support from fellow educators. Although Jim did not win a seat in the election he continues to look forward to new ventures outside education.

CHAPTER EIGHT

REFLECTIONS ON PROCESS AND LITERATURE

What common theme reoccurs in all of the preceding principals' stories? Each principal, in one way or other has spoken of the importance of respecting the dignity and worth of the individual, be it respecting a teacher, a parent or a student. Nancy went out of her way to assist a student with an addiction problem, working with both the girl and her mother. Jane, not wanting to force issues with a staff would cook for them, trying to make them happy and harmonious. Jim tried his best to intervene in a situation which could have ruined both the personal and professional lives of two of his colleagues. Joan tried to obtain help for children she saw as abused.

The process of collaborative autobiography offered an opportunity for these four administrators to recognize, appreciate and celebrate - together - their efforts.

Butt, Townsend and Raymond (1990) brought focus to the importance of collaborative relationships that develop when principals share life stories. The act of interacting with peers, planning action, and reflecting on experience all require making the implicit/explicit to serve cognitive, communicative, and emotional functions. What the group work also adds, even if they sometimes deal with conflict, is

positive interpersonal support and mutual affirmation (Huberman, 1988) as they pursue common goals. Thus the social context of a group of colleagues working on a common project simultaneously challenges the individual while providing mutual support and encouragement (Butt, 1990). It creates a sheltered environment for taking risks.

Within the group of four principals it was often expressed that the feeling of trust was established quickly and they felt that they were in a protected environment and could take a risk and share private parts of themselves that they had never done before. The sharing of life stories allowed the principals to see how the nature of self, in its context over time, is related to the philosophical and interpersonal aspects of their administrative practice.

Ryan and Drake (1992, p.16) believed that this narrative approach can generate a more practical form of knowledge for administrators. Self-referential knowledge and experienced wisdom, which accompanies these narratives, can provide a perspective of administrative life which is not accessible through traditional approaches of courses in educational administration. This process allows administrators to be able to envision not only a more realistic view of administrative life, but also acquire a sense of how to deal with the challenges in an uncertain world.

By working through the four stages of this process, working reality, pedagogy, personal and professional past and

the future, administrators could look as a group on ways to manage real life, messy, unstructured problems that often do not have straightforward or simple solutions. Principals come to know themselves and others a little better as they work through these challenges. One important value was self-esteem found in all four stories. Steinem (1992) in The Revolution From Within noted that self-esteem is a journey of self reflection and coming to a better understanding and acceptance of ourselves. Each of these principals are on different phases of the process of understanding themselves both as principals and people. To truly know one self is a life long journey and along the way others help by giving us glimpses of who we really are. This process helped these principals come to a better self understanding. They are given opportunities to reflect on and thus to better understand the implicit values which inform their practices.

By examining the explicit and implicit values embedded in their personal narratives students are in a better position to initiate personal and social change (Ryan and Drake, 1992). At this time when school life is subject to increasing fragmentation, the establishment of a coherent narrative of self identity and an appreciation of diversity may prove most helpful to principals. What is most important from principal stories is that more often than not that when principals are thrown into situations of confusion - even chaos they respond to these challenges by coming up with creative solutions that

address the complexities of life.

Ryan and Drake (1992) noted that the exploration of personal narratives for administrators helps to stimulate the flux of lived experiences, and promotes a deeper understanding of oneself and others and helps to enhance the administrative capabilities. From self-referential knowledge and experienced wisdom, principals can come to a better understanding of which implicit values inform their practices. Therefore to come to a better understanding of what teaching is, Barth (1990) believed that one must spend time in self reflection for when one comes to a better knowledge of self then one can understand others. From the stories that were told by the four principals both explicit and implicit values were embedded.

Since reality does not exist "out there" to be discovered but is instead constructed by each of us through our experiences, this research study of four principals' stories ought to be seen as a construction rather than a reflection of the real world. Connelly and Clandinin (1989) stated that such a research study does not begin with a particular research question or focus. Instead, the focus and ideas generated by the study must be situated within their socio-historical contexts in order to begin to understand and critique them.

Bollnow (1979) wrote that within each educator there is a need for the "person" to occupy a dominant place in any

discussion of education. Bollnow referred to three important values or virtues of an educator that were the love of educating, patience and trust. These values or virtues tie in closely with the themes identified in the principals' stories.

In describing the virtue of the love of educating, Bollnow (1979) referred to the educator's naive love for the children in their helplessness and the love for their potentialities which inspire constructive work. In thinking back to the principal stories, Nancy tried to help the drug addicted preteen girl and Joan attempted to assist the children in an abusive family. There was an awareness of their helplessness and a desire to make their situation better.

The second virtue Bollnow (1979) speaks of is patience which he describes as the art of being able to wait. He says we all tend to anticipate events, and patience calls for each of us to wait for the right opportunity to come and assist someone. Patience also denotes the willing acceptance of adversities, the endurance required to adapt oneself to the inevitable with all its bitterness. When educators have patience they show a willingness to accept human foibles, bad habits and an ability to forgive and start anew. As is written in the Gospel of Matthew (18:21-23) on asking the question how many times one should forgive our brother, the Lord tells us not to forgive just seven times but seventy times seven and each time to begin again with new confidence.

From all four principal stories there is a demonstration of patience in the face of adversity. Jim showed patience when he had to confront a fellow administrator and a teacher who might have been involved in an illicit affair. He had to have confidence in himself and have a desire to help others, and also have a willingness to forgive them and work with them both again.

Nancy had to have patience with the abusive parents she worked with in high needs schools and each time go back and work in a difficult school environment and not give up hope for the children. She also had to show patience with an organization that was more interested in their image and how things looked on paper than in lending support to help deal with the messy problems with which schools have to contend.

Joan had to continue to learn the lesson of patience and tolerance and come to the realization that one cannot always anticipate events and solve problems quickly. She had to learn to have the inner strength to accept difficulties and learn and grow from them.

Jane showed patience in her personal life as she had to go through a difficult divorce and reach the point of forgiving her ex husband while finding herself and finding her own way again.

Another important virtue of an educator that Bollnow (1979) speaks of is trust. Children cannot develop properly unless there is trust in the people around them and their

development may be seriously harmed by the withdrawal of that trust. Barth (1990) talks of the trusts he has for teachers. His remedies for schools' ills arise from this trust in the energy, commitment, imagination and potential of teachers and principals. It is most important that the principal create this spirit of trust for teachers and children in schools.

When a principal believes in and affirms his/her teachers they in turn believe in the children in their care, and then a confidence develops in the school. To accomplish this trust and confidence Bollnow (1979) noted that the educator must summon up this confidence over and over again from the inner power of the soul.

All of these virtues must be sustained by a deep faith that in spite of setbacks and the failures of an educator, his/her activity has significance. Therefore there must exist the belief that the work of an educator has a purposefulness in the world. These beliefs have helped to sustain the principals in this study through the difficult times both in their personal and professional lives.

Greenfield (1975,1985) highlighted the need for research which places people and their characters central to analysis. MacPherson (1985) believed that biographical studies provide relatively important knowledge about practice. Such knowledge is crucial to understanding the conceiving of practice. Ryan and Drake (1992, p.2) stated that the telling and writing of narratives of experience gave principals the opportunity to

critically probe their own experiences, integrate these experiences with the themes that came out of their stories and thus be in a better position to initiate personal and social change.

From all the writers discussed up to this point, ranging from Bollnow who addresses the special values and virtues of an educator to the importance of bringing these values into focus through life stories through autobiography and narrative as noted by Ryan and Drake (1992) these are ways to better understand administrative practice. From these writers there is no separation between the principal as professional and as person, they are one and the same. The time has come for administrators to take down the facades of principal as professional and show the human aspects of their person. For when principals take the time to look at themselves and reflect on their actions, they in turn become more accepting of others. Through this process of collaborative autobiography it affords principals the opportunity to open up, support colleagues and grow in ways both personally and professionally.

Reflections On The Process

This collaborative autobiographical study presented many challenges to me as researcher and participant. One of these was the time commitment required of the participants - twenty one hours over a three month period. At first I worried if a

principal would start in the process and would then drop out. In reality there was real enthusiasm among the principals to come and share their stories with the rest of the group and it was only health problems that kept them from attending. Principals altered their schedules so that they could attend these sessions.

This process was much more difficult when working with persons that you knew, and when you have first hand knowledge of the organization discussed. At times there was a real emotional toll as the principals shared their pain, anger and frustrations. With a group of strangers there may not be the same level of involvement but there also may not be the mutual respect that readily existed with the group in a very short time period of being together. This can make the use of this process with a staff questionable unless the facilitator is very confident with both oneself and the process.

Several principals said that they felt that they could trust me and I would protect their confidences. Those comments carried a heavy weight for me as I did not want to break that trust or in anyway hurt them. The trust did develop quickly but it did not deepen over the process among participants. The fact that the men did not trust one of the female participants infers that they only shared things that did not involve the self. Such lack of trust if not resolved can seriously damage the collaborative autobiographical process. In this study the trust issue was resolved.

The stories that the members of the group chose to disclose tended to reflect problems with individual situations. Not one of the principals discussed school improvement concerns specifically. The discussions of these situations highlighted the difficult nature of administration for many principals, the lack of support from other social agencies, and the unwillingness of central administration to recognize these concerns and take coordinated action.

In writing and analyzing the stories there were over six hundred pages of taped interviews to review and analyze for themes. This was a most time consuming task. I found that after the process was completed a length of time was needed to distance myself from the work in order to allow me to be objective with some of the stories. Health factors impacted the study also. Of the seven participants, two could not attend all the sessions due to health reasons and one principal was facing a personal crisis in his life, and needed some time for his life to get back together. Hence only four stories are included.

I wanted to have a gender balance in this research study, and so I began with three men and three women and myself as facilitator. At the end of the process, the stories were of three women and one male principal. Efforts were made to balance gender, but the circumstances did not work out that way.

Another important aspect of this process was to try to

keep the reactions to the stories non - judgemental. As the facilitator I tried to model an affirming and accepting approach to the stories and when someone became judgemental, a look or humorous comment was a reminder to bring them back into focus. Confidentiality was a crucial aspect of this process and I reminded them that this research was not as important to me as the fact that they honour and respect each other confidences.

I found it was more difficult to keep the group together and focused on questions than I thought, especially when personal problems surfaced or when illness occurred. It was hard to keep the group cohesive because the group depended on a common knowing of each others' problems and background. At the end of the three month period I was happy to bring closure to the process but the others in the group did not want the sessions to end. For me being conscious of the role I had to play as facilitator and keeping the group going, I was glad to see the end.

In this role as researcher/facilitator I began each new topic and modelled my story in the first sharing session. I hoped that by being open and honest about my own experiences, the other principals would feel the freedom to take a risk and share their experiences. Over the course of the three month period the group helped each other through personal pain and were supportive of each other, and a strong bond of friendship and caring was formed in the group which carried beyond the

group sharing sessions to other meetings.

Principals were most comfortable in telling the stories of their personal and professional past because these stories were of hardships overcome. Themes of alcoholism and family breakups figured in a number of the stories which made the sharing of stories easier.

The group was encouraged to use the process in school improvement projects. Individuals in the group, however, were not comfortable in leading others through the process and the values inherent in school improvement were challenging for some of the participants who had to learn to embed them more fully in their daily lives. Until this was accomplished staff would have difficulty believing in the process.

In the future, if using this process with a group of administrators I would revise the sequence of topics placing personal and professional past after working reality in order to help participants reflect on the possible relationship between the two topics. The theme of pedagogy as used in this study was based upon research used primarily with teachers. In future research with administrators, I would focus more upon a topic more relevant to the life world of principals such as school improvement issues and the workstyle of an administrator and take care in explaining the topic and its meaning to them. Administrators in this study had difficulty exploring pedagogy and distinguishing it from curriculum and philosophy of teaching.

Recommendations For This Process

Having been involved with collaborative autobiography both as a participant and as a facilitator, and having experienced the benefits of it both as a teacher and as an administrator, I feel that there is a strong potential for its use in bringing a school staff together to share the richness of their experiences. Such a sharing, in my experience can benefit not only teachers, but also students. It is a way of tapping the richness which can be found within a school without going outside for answers to challenges faced by educators. It can be used by teachers together, or as an administrative-teacher collaboration. What is important is that the leader, and the participants develop a level of trust and understanding of each other, and a willingness to learn from each other. The following are some recommendations for the use of this process within an educational context.

Preparation of the Facilitator

The facilitator should have prior experience in the process of collaborative autobiography as a member of a group and as well should have some academic training with someone experienced in the process. It is critical that any facilitator possess a sensitivity to others, and a willingness to listen to the needs of others.

School Based Reflective Practice

I have used the four parts of this process at the school level with a group of twelve teachers and support staff on a volunteer basis. We met over a ten month period on our professional days and also once a month on our early dismissal days. Upon completion I asked the staff the same four questions that I had asked the seven principals and I have included a chart (see Appendix 1) to show how the process was carried into the classroom. As a new principal in a school this process was an excellent method of bringing staff together and developing a better understanding and acceptance of each other. The staff became less dependent upon me for direction and took more ownership upon themselves for the daily life of the school. They took a strong voice in discussions that affected them and their students. They shared the richness of their experience with each other and began to solve their own problems by building a sense of community. This sense of community was carried into their classrooms, and was reflected in parents' comments that the school was a strong cohesive partnership that worked together for the betterment of the students.

Educational Leadership

This process of collaborative autobiography can be used in teaching a graduate course in Educational Leadership. By taking students through this process they may have a more

realistic view of administrative life and acquire a sense of how to deal with the challenges that principals face in an uncertain world.

Students would explore ways to manage real life, messy problems that often do not have straight forward or simple solutions. By students writing their own personal narratives they come to reflect on experiences that will lead to a personal definition of leadership. They also will come to know themselves and others a little better and learn to respond to challenges by coming up with creative solutions that address the complexities in their daily life.

Professional Development Activity

The collaborative autobiographical process may be used by school districts as a professional development activity for both potential and practising administrators. It can provide them the opportunity to understand themselves and their practice, to develop an understanding of what being an administrator is all about, and a support network for them to learn and share with their colleagues.

Final Reflections

As a researcher/facilitator and learner, each time I engaged in this process with others was a rich insightful experience for me. My own administrative career has been challenging at every level emotionally, intellectually,

spiritually and physically and has called me to gather deep inner strength and remain a positive person in the face of adversity. An aspect of this process that I most appreciate is that not only have I learned and continue to learn more about myself but the process has helped others personally and professionally and that has been a very important aspect of it for me.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

CHARTS ON THE ORGANIZATION OF THE SESSIONS

SESSION I

Time: 3 Hours

Topic: Working Reality — Introduction of topic by facilitator

Highlights:

* Need for confidentiality and trustworthiness reviewed with participants by facilitator.
* Need to avoid judgemental statements reinforced by facilitator
* Format of presentation outlined - facilitator, followed by two presenters.

Order of Presentation:

Facilitator
Male Principal
Female Principal

Contents of Presentation:

* Stories as presented by participants
* Collaborative group reaction to each story
* Identification of themes by participants

Closure:

* Facilitator brought session to a close following third presenter with a review of topic and presenters for Session II.

SESSION II

Time: 3 Hours

Topic: Working Reality — Review of topic by facilitator

Highlights:

- Written copy of the themes identified by the group from Session I handed out, discussed and reviewed by the group for accuracy - no corrections.
- Time line for presentations reviewed - one hour for each presenter
- One participant came but needed to leave for a Doctor's appointment, as he was feeling ill.

Order of Presentation: Although four presenters were scheduled, because of an illness, there were three presenters. They agreed among themselves as to the order of presentation.

Contents of Presentation:

- Stories as presented by participants
- Collaborative group reaction to each story
- Identification of themes by participants

Closure:

- Facilitator Brought Session to a Close following Third Presenter with a review of topic and presenters for Session III.

SESSION III

Time: 3 Hours

Topic: Pedagogy

Review of topic by facilitator

Highlights:

- Written copy of the themes identified by the group from Session II handed out, discussed and reviewed by the group for accuracy - no corrections.
- Time line for presentations reviewed - one hour for each presenter
- One female participant was ill and unable to attend this session.

Order of Presentation:

Although four presenters were scheduled, because of an illness, there were three presenters. The facilitator presented first to model the topic and was followed by two of the participants who had volunteered at the end of Session II to present.

Contents of Presentation:

- Stories as presented by participants
- Collaborative group reaction to each story
- Identification of themes by participants

Closure:

- Facilitator brought session to a close following third presenter with a review of topic and presenters for Session IV.

SESSION IV

Time: 3 Hours

Topic: Pedagogy — Review of topic by facilitator

Highlights:

- Written copy of the themes identified by the group from Session III handed out, discussed and reviewed by the group for accuracy - no corrections.
- Time line for presentations reviewed - one hour for each presenter
- One female (the same individual who was away for Session III) participant was ill and unable to attend this session.

Order of Presentation: Although four presenters were scheduled, because of an illness, there were three presenters who had volunteered at the end of Session III to present. They chose the order in which to present.

Contents of Presentation:

- Stories as presented by participants
- Collaborative group reaction to each story
- Identification of themes by participants

Closure:

- Facilitator brought session to a close following third presenter with a review of topic and presenters for Session V.

SESSION V

Time: 3 Hours

Topic: Personal and Professional Past

Review of topic by facilitator

Highlights:

- Written copy of the themes identified by the group from Session IV handed out, discussed and reviewed by the group for accuracy - no corrections.
- Time line for presentations reviewed - one hour for each presenter
- Three female participants were unable to attend this session due to a system meeting.

Order of Presentation:

The facilitator presented first, as this was a new topic, and was followed by two other presenters who had volunteered at the end of Session IV to present. They chose the order in which to present.

Contents of Presentation:

- Stories as presented by participants
- Collaborative group reaction to each story
- Identification of themes by participants

Closure:

- Facilitator brought session to a close following third presenter with a review of topic and presenters for Session VI.

SESSION VI

Time: 3 Hours

Topic: Personal and Professional Past

Review of topic by facilitator

Highlights:

- Written copy of the themes identified by the group from Session V were not handed out, but themes were discussed orally .
- Time line for presentations reviewed - one hour for each presenter
- One male participant (the same individual who missed session II) was unable to attend this session due to illness.

Order of Presentation:

The three female participants presented in this session. They chose the order in which to present.

Contents of Presentation:

- Stories as presented by participants
- Collaborative group reaction to each story
- Identification of themes by participants

Closure:

- Facilitator brought session to a close following third presenter with a review of topic. The order selection of presenters for Session VII was left open.
- A lunch was requested and planned for by the group to take place as a way to begin Session VII

SESSION VII

Time: 3 Hours

Topic: Future — Review of topic by facilitator

Highlights:

- Written copy of the themes identified by the group from Session VI were not handed out, but themes were discussed orally .
- Time line for presentations reviewed. Because this was an abbreviated topic, all participants would have an opportunity to present at this session. - approximately one-half hour for each participant
- The same female participant who missed Sessions III and IV was unable to attend Session VII.

Order of Presentation: The facilitator presented first due to this being a new topic. Following the facilitator, one of the male participants chaired the remainder of the session, on his own initiative. This was accepted by the group. The actual order of presentation was directed by the chair.

Contents of Presentation:

- Stories as presented by participants
- Collaborative group reaction to each story
- Identification of themes by participants

Closure:

- Facilitator brought session to a close following the final presenter and reviewed the two pending evaluations of the process with the participants. The facilitator then thanked the participants.

APPENDIX B

CHART ON COLLABORATIVE AUTOBIOGRAPHY

CHART 1

COLLABORATIVE AUTOBIOGRAPHY FEEDBACK

PERSONAL	PROFESSIONAL	CLASSROOM
Clearer understanding of personal/ professional philosophies, values and goals.		More confidence in teaching
Realization of common bond among staff - a team approach		Curriculum development sessions. Students see us as a strong team not separate entities.
Validate my practices and gained insights as we shared strategies		Group support in handling difficult students - a better understanding of student needs. Renewed an enthusiasm for teaching.
Better understanding of self and leading to empowerment of self. Professional reading provided was helpful.		Make efforts to empower the students and allow peer support and networking for them.
Trusting environment among staff Mentorship Program		Realization of setting up a trusting environment in classroom